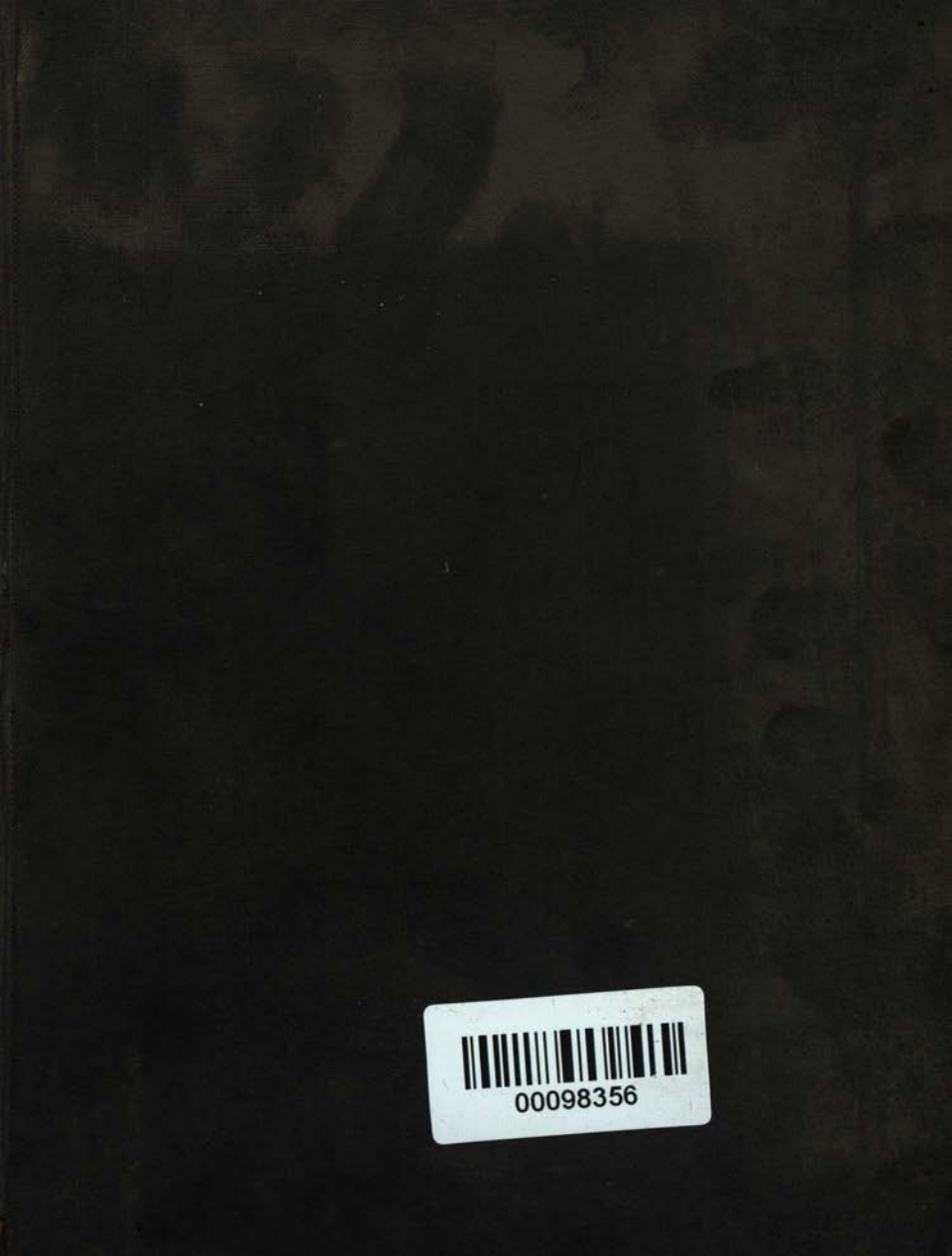
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OUR VILLAGE

BY

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MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

ILLUSTRATED

N.N.L-31

LONDON
SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE AND RIVINGTON
CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.
1879.

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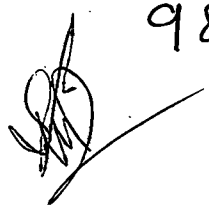

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THE following pages contain an attempt to delineate country scenery and country manners, as they exist in a small village in the south of England. The writer may at least claim the merit of a hearty love of her subject, and of that local and personal familiarity, which only a long residence in one neighbourhood could have enabled her to attain. Her descriptions have always been written on the spot and at the moment, and in nearly every instance with the closest and most resolute fidelity to the place and the people. If she be accused of having given a brighter aspect to her villagers than is usually met with in books, she cannot help it, and would not if she could. She has painted, as they appeared to her, their little frailties and their many virtues, under an intense and thankful conviction, that in every condition of life goodness and happiness may be found by those who seek them, and never more surely than in the fresh air, the shade, and the sunshine of nature.

It may be well to notify that the selections in this volume consist principally of those portions specified in the original edition of 1824 as "Walks in the Country"—abounding in descriptive word painting of country scenes, which has few equals in our language, and fully bearing out the loving enthusiasm for the task evinced in the preface.

To rival such a pen with the pencil is no easy task; but it is hoped that the spirit of the authoress has been fairly rendered by the artists engaged, whose patience and studious care the projector takes this opportunity of acknowledging.

LONDON, 1878.

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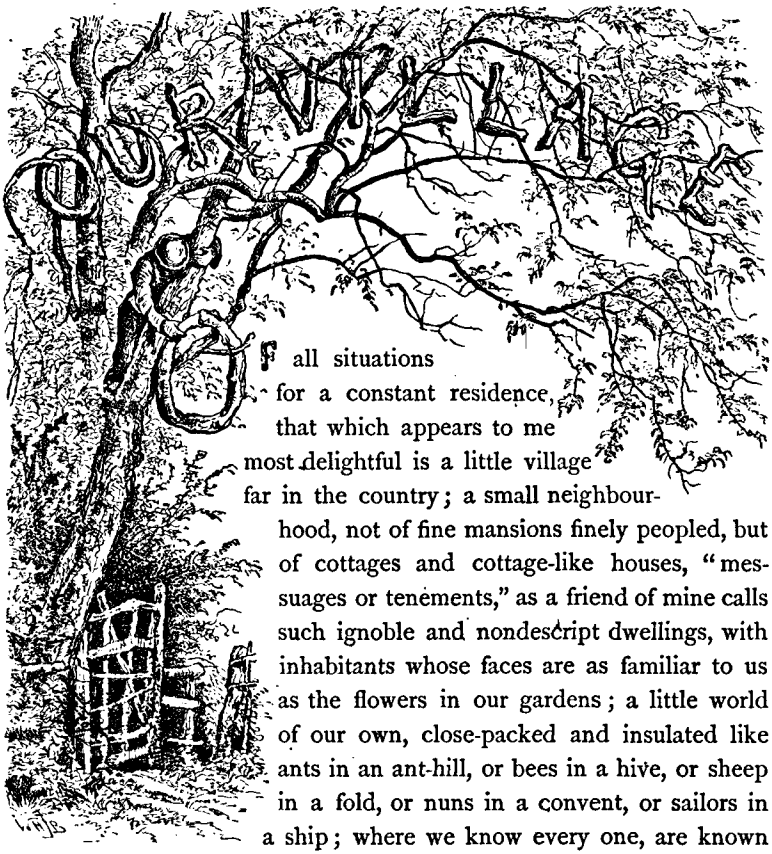
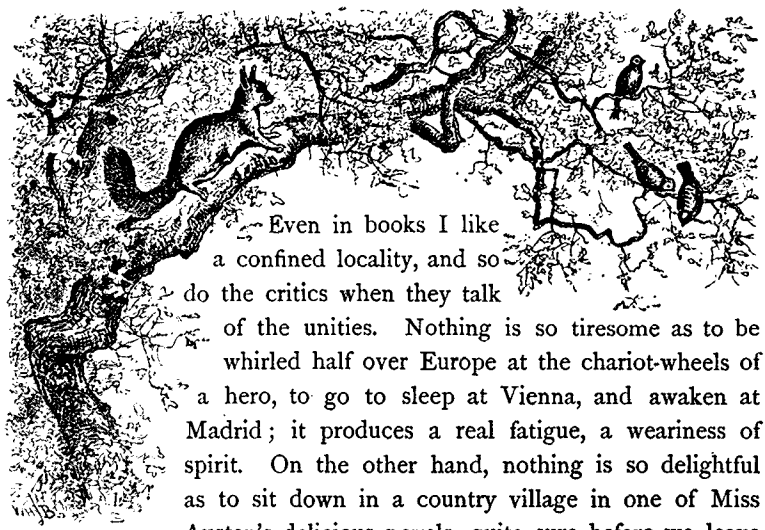


Of all situations for a constant residence, that which appears to me most delightful is a little village far in the country; a small neighbourhood, not of fine mansions finely peopled, but of cottages and cottage-like houses, "messuages or tenements," as a friend of mine calls such ignoble and nondescript dwellings, with inhabitants whose faces are as familiar to us as the flowers in our gardens; a little world of our own, close-packed and insulated like ants in an ant-hill, or bees in a hive, or sheep in a fold, or nuns in a convent, or sailors in a ship; where we know every one, are known to every one, interested in every one, and authorised to hope that every one feels an interest in us. How pleasant it is to slide into these true-hearted feelings from the kindly and unconscious influence of habit, and to learn to know and to love the people about us, with all their peculiarities, just as we learn to know and to love the nooks and turns of the shady lanes and sunny commons that we pass every day.



Even in books I like a confined locality, and so do the critics when they talk of the unities. Nothing is so tiresome as to be whirled half over Europe at the chariot-wheels of a hero, to go to sleep at Vienna, and awaken at Madrid; it produces a real fatigue, a weariness of spirit. On the other hand, nothing is so delightful as to sit down in a country village in one of Miss Austen's delicious novels, quite sure before we leave it to become intimate with every spot and every person it contains; or to ramble with Mr. White over his own parish of Selborne, and form a friendship with the fields and coppices, as well as with the birds, mice, and squirrels, who inhabit them; or to sail with Robinson Crusoe to his island, and live there with him and his goats and his man Friday;—how much we dread any new comers, any fresh importation of savage or sailor! we never sympathise for a moment in our hero's want of company, and are quite grieved when he gets away;—or to be shipwrecked with Ferdinand on that other lovelier island—the island of Prospero, and Miranda, and Caliban, and Ariel, and nobody else, none of Dryden's exotic inventions:—that is best of all. And a small neighbourhood is as good in sober waking reality as in poetry or prose; a village neighbourhood, such as this Berkshire hamlet in which I write, a long, straggling, winding street at the bottom of a fine eminence, with a road through it, always abounding in carts,

horsemen, and carriages, and lately enlivened by a stage-coach from B—— to S——, which passed through about ten days ago, and will I suppose return some time or other. There are coaches of all varieties nowadays; perhaps this may be intended for a monthly diligence, or a fortnightly fly. Will you walk with me through our village, courteous reader? The journey is not long. We will begin at the lower end, and proceed up the hill.

The tidy, square, red cottage on the right hand, with the long well-stocked garden by the side of the road, belongs to a retired publican from a neighbouring town; a substantial person with a comely wife;

one who piques himself on independence and idleness, talks politics, reads newspapers, hates the minister, and cries out for reform. He introduced into our peaceful vicinage the rebellious innovation of an illumination on the Queen's acquittal. Remonstrance and persuasion were in vain; he talked of liberty and broken windows—so we all lighted up. Oh! how he shone that night with candles, and laurel, and white bows, and gold paper, and a transparency (originally designed for a pocket handkerchief) with a flaming portrait of her Majesty, hatted and feathered, in red ochre. He had no rival in the village, that we all acknowledged; the very bonfire was less splendid; the little boys reserved their best crackers to be expended in his honour, and he gave them full sixpence more than any one else. He would like an illumination once a month; for it must not be concealed that, in spite of gardening, of newspaper reading, of jaunting about in his little cart, and frequenting both church and meeting, our worthy neighbour begins to feel the weariness of idleness. He hangs over his gate, and tries to entice passengers to stop and chat; he volunteers little jobs all round, smokes cherry trees to cure the blight, and traces and blows up all the wasp-nests in the parish. I have seen a great many wasps in our garden to-day, and shall enchant him with the intelligence. He even assists his wife in her sweepings and dustings. Poor man! he is a very respectable person, and would be a very happy one, if he would add a little employment to his dignity. It would be the salt of life to him.

Next to his house, though parted from it by another long garden with a yew arbour at the end, is the pretty dwelling of the shoemaker, a pale, sickly-looking, black-haired man, the very model of sober industry. There he sits in his little shop from early morning till late at night. An earthquake would hardly stir him: the illumination did not. He stuck immovably to his last, from the first lighting up, through the long blaze and the slow decay, till his large solitary candle was the only light in the place. One cannot conceive anything more perfect than the contempt which the man of transparencies and the man of shoes must have felt for each other on that evening. There was at least as much vanity in the sturdy industry as in the strenuous idleness, for our shoemaker is a man of substance; he employs three journeymen, two lame, and one a dwarf, so that his shop looks like an hospital; he has purchased the lease of his commodious dwelling, some even say that he has bought it out and out; and he has only one pretty daughter, a light, delicate, fair-haired girl of fourteen, the champion, protectress, and playfellow of every brat under three years old, whom she jumps, dances, dandles, and feeds all day long. A very attractive person is that child-loving girl. I have never seen any one in her station who possessed so thoroughly that undefinable charm, the lady-look.

See her on a Sunday in her simplicity and her white frock, and she might pass for an earl's daughter. She likes flowers, too, and has a profusion of white stocks under her window, as pure and delicate as herself.

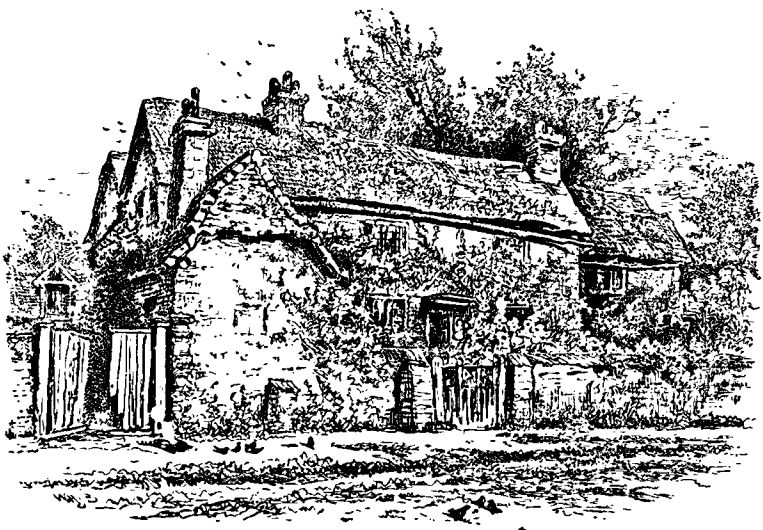
The first house on the opposite side of the way is the blacksmith's; a gloomy dwelling, where the sun never seems to shine; dark and smoky within and without, like a forge. The blacksmith is a high officer in our little state, nothing less than a constable; but alas! alas! when tumults arise, and the constable is called for, he will commonly be found in the thickest of the fray. Lucky would it be for his wife and her eight children if there were no public-house in the land: an inveterate inclination to enter those bewitching doors is Mr. Constable's only fault.

Next to this official dwelling is a spruce brick tenement, red, high, and narrow, boasting, one above another, three sash-windows, the only sash-windows in the village, with a clematis on one side and a rose on the other, tall and narrow like itself. That slender mansion has a fine genteel look. The little parlour seems made for Hogarth's old maid and her stunted footboy; for tea and card parties,—it would just hold one table; for the rustle of faded silks, and the splendour of old china; for the delight of four by honours, and a little snug, quiet scandal between the deals; for affected

gentility and real starvation. This should have been its destiny; but fate has been unpropitious; it belongs to a plump, merry, bustling dame, with four fat, rosy, noisy children, the very essence of vulgarity and plenty.

Then comes the village shop, like other village shops, multifarious as a bazaar; a repository for bread, shoes, tea, cheese, tape, ribands, and bacon; for everything, in short, except the one particular thing which you happen to want at the moment, and will be sure not to find. The people are civil and thriving, and frugal withal; they have let the upper part of their house to two young women (one of them is a pretty blue-eyed girl) who teach little children their A B C, and make caps and gowns for their mammas,—parcel schoolmistress, parcel mantua-maker. I believe they find adorning the body a more profitable vocation than adorning the mind.

Divided from the shop by a narrow yard, and opposite the shoemaker's, is a habitation of whose inmates I shall say nothing. A cottage—no—a miniature house, with many additions, little odds and ends of places,



pantries, and what not; all angles, and of a charming in-and-outness; a little bricked court before one-half, and a little flower-yard before the other; the walls, old and weather-stained, covered with hollyhocks, roses, honeysuckles, and a great apricot-tree; the casements full of geraniums; (ah, there is our superb white cat peeping out from among them!) the closets (our landlord has the assurance to call them rooms) full of contrivances and corner-cupboards; and the little garden behind full of common flowers, tulips, pinks, larkspurs, peonies, stocks, and carnations, with an arbour of privet, not unlike a sentry-box, where one lives in a delicious green light, and looks out on the gayest of all gay flower-beds. That house was built on purpose to show in what an exceedingly small compass comfort may be packed. Well, I will loiter there no longer.

The next tenement is a place of importance, the Rose inn; a white-washed building, retired from the road behind its fine swinging sign, with a little bow-window room coming out on one side, and forming, with our stable on the other, a sort of open square, which is the constant resort of carts, waggons, and return chaises. There are two carts there now, and mine host is serving them with beer in his eternal red waistcoat. He is a thriving man, and a portly, as his waistcoat attests, which has been twice let out within this twelvemonth. Our landlord has a stirring

wife, a hopeful son, and a daughter, the belle of the village; not so pretty as the fair nymph at the shoe-shop, and far less elegant, but ten times as fine; all curl-papers in the morning, like a porcupine, all curls in the afternoon, like a poodle, with more flounces than curl-papers, and more lovers than curls. Miss Phœbe is fitter for town than country; and, to do her justice, she has a consciousness of that fitness, and turns her steps townward as often as she can. She

is gone to B—— to-day with her last and principal lover, a recruiting serjeant—a man as tall as Serjeant Kite, and as impudent. Some day or other he will carry off Miss Phœbe.

In a line with the bow-window room is a low garden-wall, belonging to a house under repair:—the white house opposite the collar-maker's shop, with four lime-trees before it, and a waggon-load of bricks at the door. That house is the plaything of a wealthy, well-meaning, whimsical person, who lives about a mile off. He has a passion for brick and mortar, and being too wise to meddle with his own residence, diverts himself with altering and re-altering, improving and re-improving, doing and undoing here. It is a perfect Penelope's web. Carpenters and bricklayers have been at work for these eighteen months, and yet I sometimes stand and wonder whether anything has really been done. One exploit in last June was, however, by no means equivocal. Our good neighbour fancied that the limes shaded the rooms, and made them dark, (there was not a creature in the house but the workmen,) so he had all the leaves stripped from every tree. There they stood, poor miserable skeletons, as bare as Christmas under the glowing midsummer sun. Nature revenged herself, in her own sweet and gracious manner; fresh leaves sprang out, and at nearly Christmas the foliage was as brilliant as when the outrage was committed.

Next door lives a carpenter, "famed ten miles round, and worthy all his fame,"—few cabinet-makers surpass him, with his excellent wife, and their little daughter Lizzy, the plaything and queen of the village, a

child three years old according to the register, but six in size and strength and intellect, in power and in self-will. She manages everybody in the place, her schoolmistress included; turns the wheeler's children out of their own little cart, and makes them draw her; seduces cakes and lollypops from the very shop window; makes the lazy carry her, the silent talk to her, the grave romp with her; does anything she pleases; is absolutely irresistible. Her chief attraction lies in her exceeding power of loving, and her firm reliance on the love and indulgence of others. How impossible it would be to disappoint the dear little girl when she runs to meet you, slides her pretty hand into yours, looks up gladly in your face, and says, "Come!" You must go: you cannot help it. Another part of her charm is her singular beauty. Together with a good deal of the character of Napoleon, she has something of his square, sturdy, upright form, with the finest limbs in the world, a complexion purely English, a round laughing face, sunburnt and rosy, large merry blue eyes, curling brown hair, and a wonderful play of countenance. She has the imperial attitudes too, and loves to stand with her hands behind her, or folded over her bosom; and sometimes,

when she has a little touch of shyness, she clasps them together on the top of her head, pressing down her shining curls, and looking so exquisitely pretty! Yes, Lizzy is queen of the village! She has but one rival in her dominions, a certain white greyhound called Mayflower, much her friend, who resembles her in beauty and strength, in playfulness, and almost in sagacity, and reigns over the animal world as she over the human. They are both coming with me, Lizzy and Lizzy's "pretty May." We are now at the end of the street; a cross-lane, a rope-walk, shaded with limes and oaks, and a cool clear pond overhung

with elms, lead us to the bottom of the hill. There is still one house round the corner, ending in a picturesque wheeler's shop. The dwelling-house is more ambitious. Look at the fine flowered window-blinds, the green door with the brass knocker, and the somewhat prim but very civil person, who is sending off a labouring man with sirs and curtsies enough for a prince of the blood. Those are the curate's lodgings—apartments

his landlady would call them: he lives with his own family four miles off, but once or twice a week he comes to his neat little parlour to write sermons, to marry, or to bury, as the case may require. Never were better or kinder people than his host and hostess: and there is a fine reflection of clerical importance about them since their connexion with the Church, which is quite edifying—a decorum, a gravity, a solemn

politeness. Oh, to see the worthy wheeler carry the gown after his lodger on a Sunday, nicely pinned up in his wife's best handkerchief!—or to hear him rebuke a squalling child or a squabbling woman! The curate is nothing to him. He is fit to be perpetual churchwarden.

We must now cross the lane into the shady rope-walk. That pretty white cottage opposite, which stands straggling at the end of the village in a garden full of flowers, belongs to our mason, the shortest of men,

and his handsome, tall wife: he, a dwarf, with the voice of a giant; one starts when he begins to talk as if he were shouting through a speaking trumpet; she, the sister, daughter, and grand-daughter, of a long line of gardeners, and no contemptible one herself. It is very magnanimous in me not to hate her; for she beats me in my own way, in chrysanthemums, and dahlias, and the like gauds. Her plants are sure to live; mine have a sad trick of dying, perhaps because I love them, "not

wisely, but too well," and kill them with over-kindness. Half-way up the hill is another detached cottage, the residence of an officer, and his beautiful family. That eldest boy, who is hanging over the gate, and looking with such intense childish admiration at my Lizzy, might be a model for a Cupid.

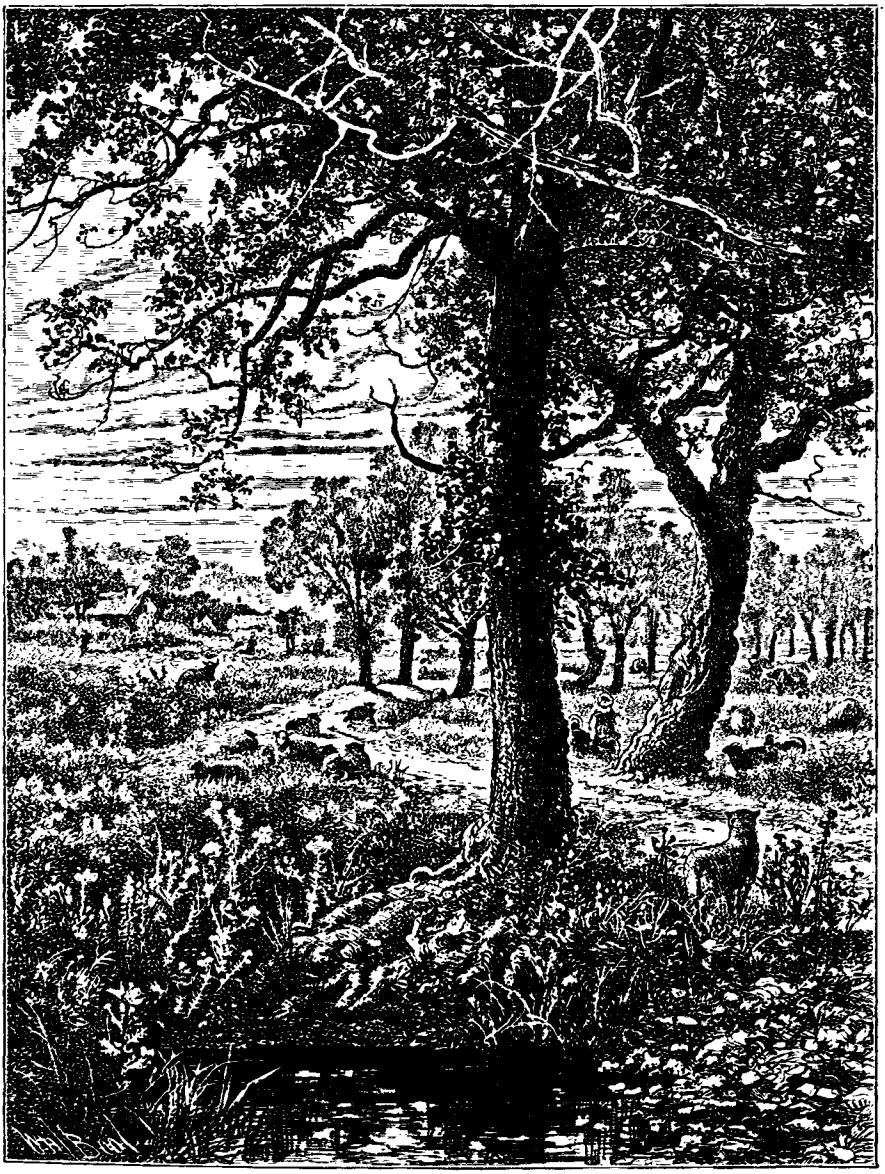
How pleasantly the road winds up the hill, with its broad green borders and hedge-rows so thickly timbered! How finely the evening

sun falls on that sandy excavated bank, and touches the farm-house on the top of the eminence! and how clearly defined and relieved is the figure of the man who is just coming down! It is poor John Evans, the gardener—an excellent gardener till about ten years ago, when he lost his wife and became insane. He was sent to St. Luke's, and dismissed as cured; but his power was gone and his strength; he could no longer manage a garden, nor submit to the restraint, nor encounter the fatigue of regular employment; so he retreated to the workhouse, the pensioner and factotum of the village, amongst whom he divides his services. His mind often wanders, intent on some fantastic and impracticable plan, and lost to present objects; but he is perfectly harmless, and full of a child-like simplicity, a smiling contentedness, a most touching gratitude. Every one is kind to John Evans, for there is that about him which must be loved; and his unprotectedness, his utter defencelessness, have an irresistible claim on every better feeling. I know nobody who inspires so deep and tender a pity; he improves all around him. He is useful, too, to the extent of his little power; will do anything, but loves gardening best, and still piques himself on his old arts of pruning fruit-trees, and raising cucumbers. He is the happiest of men just now, for he has the management of a melon bed—a melon bed! —fie! What a grand, pompous name was that for three melon plants under a hand-light! John Evans is sure that they will succeed. We shall see: as the chancellor said, "I doubt."

We are now on the very brow of the eminence, close to the Hill-house and its beautiful garden. On the outer edge of the paling, hanging over the bank that skirts the road, is an old thorn—such a thorn! The long sprays covered with snowy blossoms, so graceful, so elegant, so lightsome, and yet so rich! There only wants a pool under the thorn to give a still lovelier reflection, quivering and trembling, like a tuft of feathers, whiter and greener than the life, and more prettily mixed with the bright blue sky. There should indeed be a pool; but on the dark grass-plat, under the high bank, which is crowned by that magnificent plume, there is something that does almost as well,—Lizzy and Mayflower in the midst of a game at romps, "making a sunshine in the shady place;" Lizzy rolling, laughing, clapping her hands, and glowing like a rose; Mayflower playing about her like summer lightning, dazzling the eyes with her sudden turns, her leaps, her bounds, her attacks, and her escapes. She darts round the lovely little girl, with the same momentary touch that the swallow skims over the water, and has exactly the same power of flight, the same matchless ease and strength and grace. What

a pretty picture they would make; what a pretty foreground they do make to the real landscape! The road winding down the hill with a slight bend, like that in the High-street at Oxford; a waggon slowly ascending, and a horseman passing it at a full trot—(ah! Lizzy, Mayflower will certainly desert you to have a gambol with that blood-horse!) half-way down, just at the turn, the red cottage of the lieutenant, covered with vines, the very image of comfort and content; farther down, on the opposite side, the small white dwelling of the little mason; then the limes and the rope-walk; then the village street, peeping through the trees, whose clustering tops hide all but the chimneys, and various roofs of the houses, and here and there some angle of a wall: farther on, the elegant town of B——, with its fine old church-towers and spires; the whole view shut in by a range of chalky hills; and over every part of the picture, trees so profusely scattered, that it appears like a woodland scene, with glades and villages intermixed. The trees are of all kinds

and all hues, chiefly the finely-shaped elm, of so deep and bright a green, the tips of whose high outer branches drop down with such a crisp and garland-like richness, and the oak, whose stately form is just now so splendidly adorned by the sunny colouring of the young leaves. Turning again up the hill, we find ourselves on that peculiar charm of English scenery, a green common, divided by the road; the right side fringed by hedge-rows and trees, with cottages and farm-houses irregularly placed, and terminated by a double avenue of noble oaks; the left, prettier still, dappled by bright pools of water, and islands of cottages and cottage-gardens, and sinking gradually down to corn-fields and meadows, and an old farm-house, with pointed roofs and clustered chimneys, looking out from its blooming orchard and backed by woody hills. The common is itself the prettiest part of the prospect; half covered with low furze, whose golden blossoms reflect so intensely the last beams of the setting sun, and alive with cows and sheep, and two sets of cricketers; one of young men, surrounded by spectators, some standing, some sitting, some stretched on the grass, all taking a delighted interest in the game; the other, a merry group of little boys, at a humble distance, for whom even cricket is scarcely lively enough, shouting, leaping, and enjoying themselves to their hearts' content. But cricketers and country boys are too important persons in our village to be talked of merely as figures in the landscape. They deserve an individual introduction—an essay to themselves—and they shall have it. No fear of forgetting the good-humoured faces that meet us in our walks every day.



"A GREEN COMMON, DIVIDED BY THE ROAD."

FROST.

JANUARY 23rd.—At noon to-day I and my white greyhound, Mayflower, set out for a walk into a very beautiful world,—a sort of silent fairy-land,—a creation of that matchless magician the hoar-frost. There had been just snow enough to cover the earth and all its colours with one sheet of pure and uniform white, and just time enough since the snow had fallen to allow the hedges to be freed of their fleecy load, and clothed with a delicate coating of rime. The atmosphere was deliciously calm; soft, even mild, in spite of the thermometer; no perceptible air, but a stillness that might almost be felt; the sky, rather grey than blue, throwing out in bold relief the snow-covered roofs of our village, and the rimy trees that rise above them, and the sun shining dimly as through a veil, giving a pale fair light, like the moon, only brighter. There was a silence, too, that might become the moon, as we stood at our little gate looking up the quiet street; a sabbath-like pause of

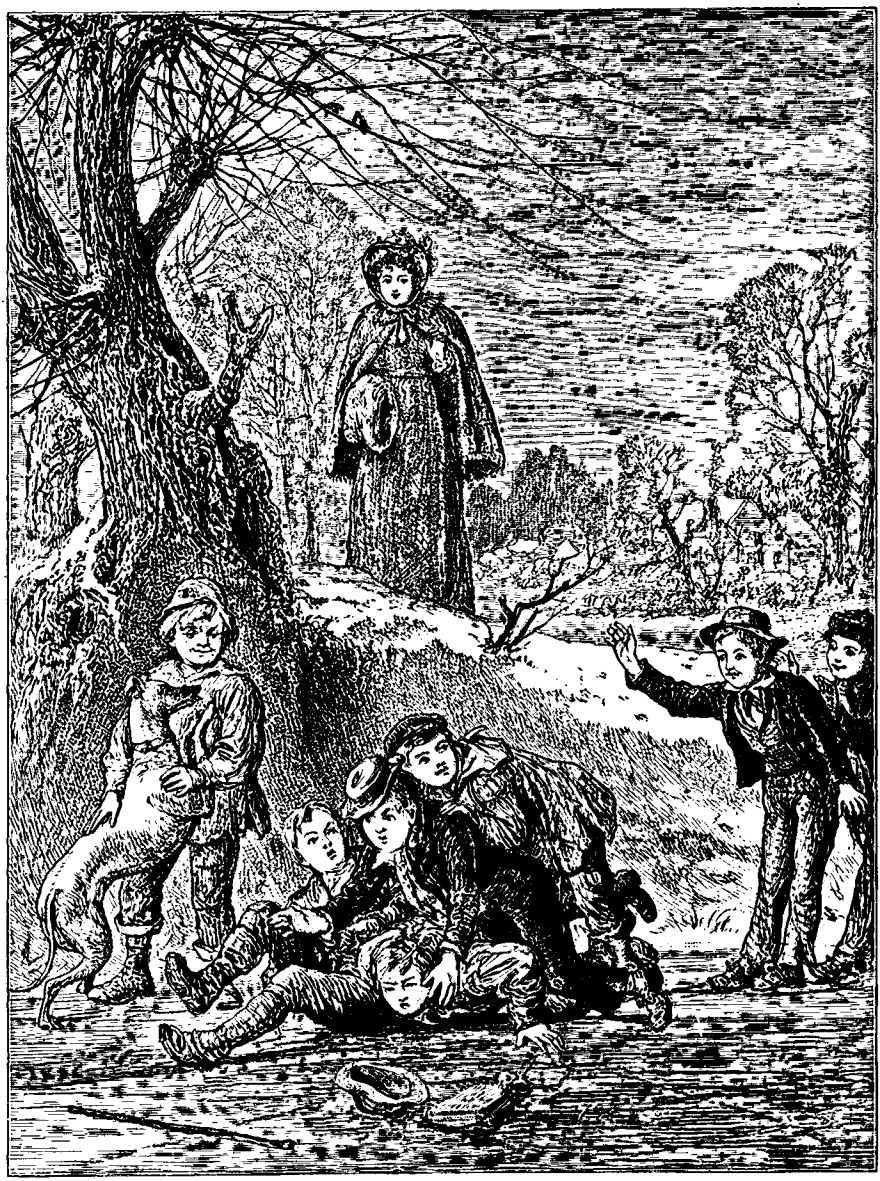
work and play, rare on a work-day; nothing was audible but the pleasant hum of frost, that low monotonous sound, which is perhaps the nearest approach that life and nature can make to absolute silence. The very waggons as they come down the hill along the beaten track of crisp yellowish frost-dust glide along like shadows; even May's bounding footsteps, at her height of glee and of speed, fall like snow upon snow.

But we shall have noise enough presently: May has stopped at Lizzy's door; and Lizzy, as she sat on the window-sill with her bright rosy face laughing through the casement, has seen her and disappeared. She is coming. No! The key is turning in the door, and sounds of

evil omen issue through the key-hole—sturdy "let me outs," and "I will goes," mixed with shrill cries on May and on me from Lizzy, piercing through a low continuous harangue, of which the prominent parts are apologies, chilblains, sliding, broken bones, lollypops, rods, and gingerbread, from Lizzy's careful mother. "Don't scratch the door, May! Don't roar so, my Lizzy! We'll call for you as we come back."—"I'll go now! Let me out! I will go!" are the last words of Miss Lizzy. Mem. Not to spoil that child—if I can help it. But I do think her mother might have let the poor little soul walk with us to-day. Nothing worse for children than coddling. Nothing better for chilblains than exercise. Besides, I don't believe she has any—and as to breaking her bones in sliding, I don't suppose there's a slide on the common. These murmuring cogitations have brought us up the hill, and half-way across the light and airy common, with its bright expanse of snow and its clusters of cottages, whose turf fires send such wreaths of smoke sailing up the air, and diffuse such aromatic fragrance round. And now comes the delightful sound of childish voices, ringing with glee and merriment almost from beneath our feet. Ah, Lizzy, your mother was right! They are shouting from that deep irregular pool, all glass now, where, on two long, smooth, liny slides, half a dozen ragged urchins are slipping along in tottering triumph. Half a dozen steps bring us to the bank right above them. May can hardly resist the temptation of joining her friends, for most of the varlets are of her acquaintance, especially the rogue who leads the slide,—he with the brimless hat, whose bronzed complexion and white flaxen hair, reversing the usual lights and shadows of the human countenance, give so strange and foreign a look to his flat and comic features. This hobgoblin, Jack Rapley by name, is May's great crony; and she stands on the brink of the steep, irregular descent, her black eyes fixed full upon him, as if she intended him the favour of jumping on his head. She does: she is down, and upon him: but Jack Rapley is not easily to be knocked off his feet. He

saw her coming, and in the moment of her leap sprung dexterously off the slide on the rough ice, steadying himself by the shoulder of the next in the file, which unlucky follower, thus unexpectedly checked in his career, fell plump backwards, knocking down the rest of the line like a nest of card-houses. There is no harm done; but there they lie, roaring, kicking, sprawling, in every attitude of comic distress, whilst Jack Rapley and Mayflower, sole authors of this calamity, stand apart from the throng, fondling, and coquetting, and complimenting each other, and very visibly laughing, May in her black eyes, Jack in his wide, close-shut mouth, and his whole monkey-face, at their comrades' mischances. I think, Miss May, you may as well come up again, and leave Master Rapley to fight your battles. He'll get out of the scrape. He is a rustic wit—a sort of Robin Goodfellow—the sauciest, idlest, cleverest, best-natured boy in the parish; always foremost in mischief, and always ready to do a good turn. The sages of our village predict sad things of Jack Rapley, so that I am sometimes a little ashamed to confess, before wise people, that I have a lurking predilection for him (in common with other naughty ones), and that I like to hear him talk to May almost as well as she does. "Come, May!" and up she springs, as light as a bird. The road is gay now; carts and post-chaises, and girls in red cloaks, and, afar off, looking almost like a toy, the coach. It meets us fast and soon. How much happier the walkers look than the riders—especially the frost-bitten gentleman, and the shivering lady with the invisible face, sole passengers of that commodious machine! Hooded, veiled, and bonneted as she is, one sees from her attitude how miserable she would look uncovered.

Another pond, and another noise of children. More sliding? Oh, no! This is a sport of higher pretension. Our good neighbour, the lieutenant, skating, and his own pretty little boys, and two or three other four-year-old elves, standing on the brink in an ecstasy of joy and wonder! Oh what happy spectators! And what a happy performer!



"KNOCKING DOWN THE REST OF THE LINE LIKE A NEST OF CARD-HOUSES."

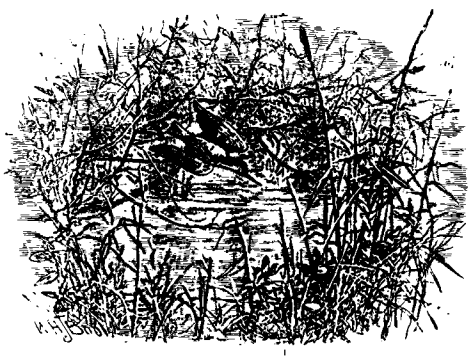
They admiring, he admired, with an ardour and sincerity never excited by all the quadrilles and the spread-eagles of the Seine and the Serpentine. He really skates well though, and I am glad I came this way; for, with all the father's feelings sitting gaily at his heart, it must still gratify the pride of skill to have one spectator at that solitary pond who has seen skating before.

Now we have reached the trees,—the beautiful trees! never so beautiful as to-day. Imagine the effect of a straight and regular double avenue of oaks, nearly a mile long, arching over-head, and closing into perspective like the roof and columns of a cathedral, every tree and branch incrusted with the bright and delicate congelation of hoar-frost, white and pure as snow, delicate and defined as carved ivory. How beautiful it is, how uniform, how various, how filling, how satiating to the

eye and to the mind—above all, how melancholy! There is a thrilling awfulness, an intense feeling of simple power in that naked and colourless beauty, which falls on the heart like the thought of death—death pure, and glorious, and smiling, but still death. Sculpture has always the

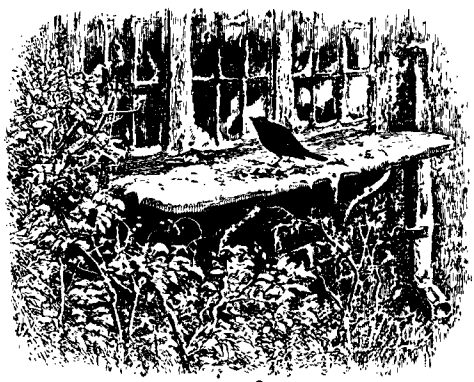
same effect on my imagination, and painting never. Colour is life. We are now at the end of this magnificent avenue, and at the top of a steep eminence commanding a wide view over four counties—a landscape of snow. A deep lane leads abruptly down the hill; a mere narrow cart-track, sinking between high banks clothed with fern and furze and low broom, crowned with luxuriant hedgerows, and famous for their summer smell of thyme. How lovely these banks are now—the tall

weeds and the gorse fixed and stiffened in the hoar-frost, which fringes round the bright prickly holly, the pendant foliage of the bramble, and the deep orange leaves of the pollard oaks! Oh, this is rime in its loveliest form! And there is still a berry here and there on the holly, "blushing in its natural coral" through the delicate tracery, still a stray hip or haw for the small birds, who abound here always. The poor birds, how tame they are, how sadly tame! There is the beautiful and rare crested wren, "that shadow of a bird," as White of Selborne calls it, perched in the middle of the hedge, nestling as it were amongst the cold bare boughs, seeking, poor pretty thing, for the warmth it will not



find. And there, farther on, just under the bank, by the slender runlet, which still trickles between its transparent fantastic margin of thin ice, as if it were a thing of life,—there, with a swift, scudding motion, flits, in short low flights, the gorgeous kingfisher, its magnificent plumage of scarlet and blue flashing in the sun, like the glories of some tropical bird. He is come for water to this little spring by the hill side,—water which even his long bill and slender head can hardly reach, so nearly do the fantastic forms of those garland-like icy margins meet over the tiny stream beneath. It is rarely that one sees the shy beauty so close or so

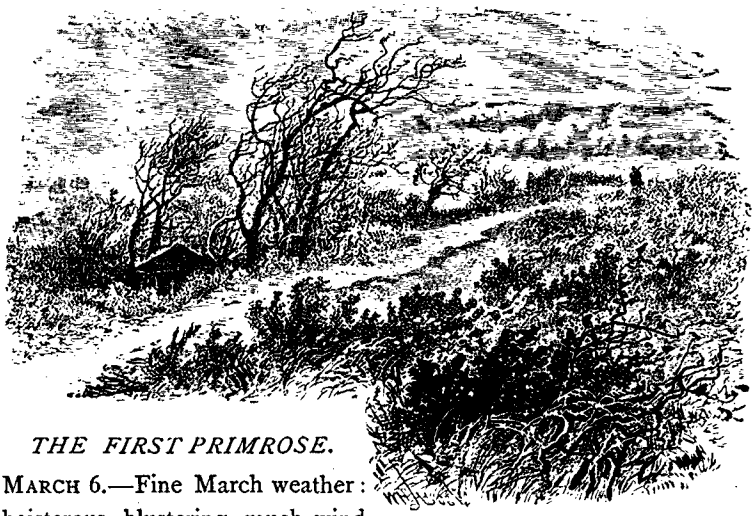
long; and it is pleasant to see him in the grace and beauty of his natural liberty, the only way to look at a bird. We used, before we lived in a street, to fix a little board outside the parlour window, and cover it with bread-crumbs in the hard weather. It was quite delightful to see the pretty things come and feed, to conquer their shyness, and do away their mistrust. First came the more social tribes, "the robin red-breast and the wren," cautiously, suspiciously, picking up a crumb on the wing, with the little keen bright eye fixed on the window; then they would stop for two pecks; then stay till they were satisfied. The shyer birds, tamed by their example, came next; and at last one saucy fellow of a blackbird—a sad glutton, he would clear the board in two minutes,—used to tap his yellow bill against the window for more. How we loved the fearless confidence of that fine, frank-hearted creature! And surely he loved us. I wonder the practice is not more general.—"May! May! naughty May!" She has frightened away the kingfisher; and now, in her coaxing penitence, she is covering me with snow. "Come, pretty May! it is time to go home."



THAW.

JANUARY 28th.—We have had rain, and snow, and frost, and rain again; four days of absolute confinement. Now it is a thaw and a flood; but our light gravelly soil, and country boots, and country hardihood, will carry us through. What a dripping, comfortless day it is! just like the last days of November: no sun, no sky, grey or blue; one low, overhanging, dark, dismal cloud, like London smoke: Mayflower is out coursing too, and Lizzy gone to school. Never mind. Up the hill again! Walk we must. Oh what a watery world to look back upon! Thames, Kennet, Loddon—all overflowed; our famous town, inland once, turned into a sort of Venice; C. park converted into an island; and the long range of meadows from B. to W. one huge unnatural lake, with trees growing out of it. Oh what a watery world!—I will look at it no longer. I will walk on. The road is alive again. Noise is re-born. Waggons creak, horses plash, carts rattle, and pattens paddle through the dirt with more than their usual clink. The common has its old fine tints of green and brown, and its old variety of inhabitants, horses,

cows, sheep, pigs, and donkeys. The ponds are unfrozen, except where some melancholy piece of melting ice floats sullenly upon the water; and cackling geese and gabbling ducks have replaced the lieutenant and Jack Rapley. The avenue is chill and dark, the hedges are dripping, the lanes knee-deep, and all nature is in a state of "dissolution and thaw."



THE FIRST PRIMROSE.

MARCH 6.—Fine March weather: boisterous, blustering, much wind and squalls of rain; and yet the sky, where the clouds are swept away, deliciously blue, with snatches of sunshine, bright and clear, and healthful, and the roads, in spite of the slight glittering showers, crisply dry. Altogether, the day is tempting, very tempting. It will not do for the dear common, that windmill of a walk; but the close sheltered lanes at the bottom of the hill, which keep out just enough of the stormy air, and let in all the sun, will be delightful. Past our old house, and round by the winding lanes, and the workhouse, and across the lea, and so into the turnpike-road again,—that is our route for to-day. Forth we set, Mayflower and I, rejoicing in the sunshine, and still more in the wind, which gives such an intense feeling of existence, and, co-operating with brisk motion, sets our blood and our spirits in a glow. For mere physical pleasure, there is nothing perhaps equal to the enjoyment of being drawn, in a light carriage, against such a wind as this, by a blood-horse at his height of speed. Walking comes next to it; but walking is not quite so luxurious or so

spiritual, not quite so much what one fancies of flying, or being carried above the clouds in a balloon.

Nevertheless, a walk is a good thing; especially under this southern hedgerow, where nature is just beginning to live again: the periwinkles with their starry blue flowers and their shining myrtle-like leaves, garlanding the bushes; woodbines and elder-trees pushing out their small swelling buds; and grasses and mosses springing forth in every variety of brown and green. Here we are at the corner where four lanes meet, or rather where a passable road of stones and gravel crosses an impassable one of beautiful but treacherous turf, and where the small white farm-house, scarcely larger than a cottage, and the well-stocked rick-yard behind, tell of comfort and order, but leave all unguessed the great riches of the master. How he became so rich is almost a puzzle; for, though the farm be his own, it is not large; and though prudent and frugal on ordinary occasions, farmer Barnard is no miser. His horses, dogs, and pigs are the best kept in the parish,—May herself, although her beauty be injured by her fatness, half envies the plight of his bitch Fly: his wife's gowns and shawls cost as much again as any shawls or gowns in the village; his dinner parties (to be sure they are not frequent) display twice the ordinary quantity of good things—two couples of ducks, two dishes of green peas, two turkey poults, two gammons of bacon, two plum-puddings; moreover, he keeps a single-horse chaise, and has built and endowed a Methodist chapel. Yet is he the richest man in these parts. Everything prospers with him. Money drifts about him like snow. He looks like a rich man. There is a sturdy squareness of face and figure; a good-humoured obstinacy; a civil importance. He never boasts of his wealth, or gives himself undue airs; but nobody can meet him at market or vestry without finding out immediately that he is the richest man there. They have no child to all this money; but there is an adopted nephew, a fine spirited lad, who may, perhaps, some day or other, play the part of a fountain to the reservoir.

Now turn up the wide road till we come to the open common, with its park-like trees, its beautiful stream, wandering and twisting along, and its rural bridge. Here we turn again, past that other white farm-house, half hidden by the magnificent elms which stand before it. Ah! riches dwell not there; but there is found the next best thing—an industrious and light-hearted poverty. Twenty years ago Rachel Hilton

was the prettiest and merriest lass in the country. Her father, an old gamekeeper, had retired to a village ale-house, where his good beer, his social humour, and his black-eyed daughter, brought much custom. She had lovers by the score; but Joseph White, the dashing and lively son of an opulent farmer, carried off the fair Rachel. They married and settled here, and here they live still, as merrily as ever, with fourteen children of all ages and sizes, from nineteen years to nineteen months,

working harder than any people in the parish, and enjoying themselves more. I would match them for labour and laughter against any family in England. She is a blithe, jolly dame, whose beauty has amplified into comeliness; he is tall, and thin, and bony, with sinews like whipcord, a strong lively voice, a sharp weather-beaten face, and eyes and lips that

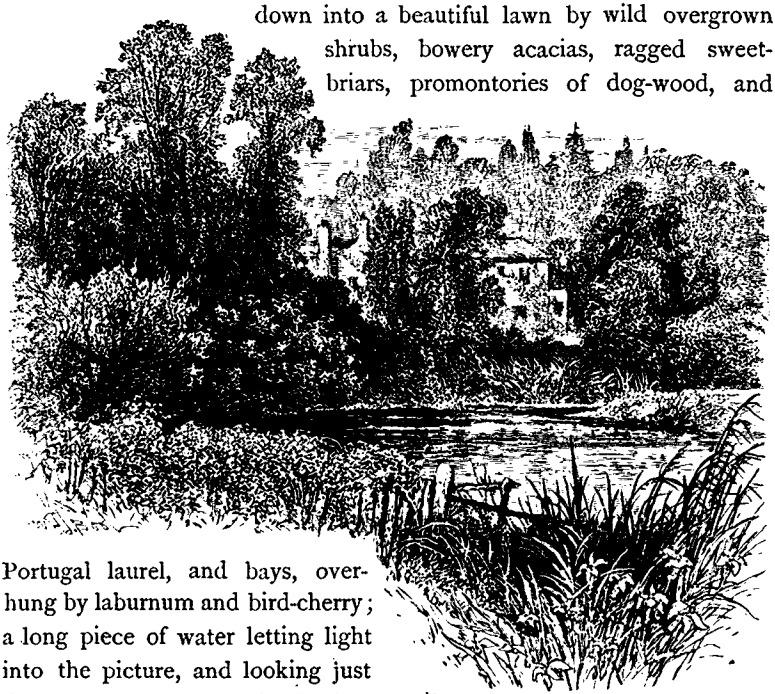
smile and brighten when he speaks into a most contagious hilarity. They are very poor, and I often wish them richer; but I don't know—perhaps it might put them out.

Quite close to farmer White's is a little ruinous cottage, white-washed once, and now in a sad state of betweenity, where dangling stockings and shirts, swelled by the wind, drying in a neglected garden, give signal of a washerwoman. There dwells, at present in single blessedness, Betty Adams, the wife of our sometime gardener. I never saw any one who so much reminded me in person of that lady whom everybody knows, Mistress Meg Merrilies;—as tall, as grizzled, as stately, as dark, as gipsy-looking, bonneted and gowned like her prototype, and

almost as oracular. Here the resemblance ceases. Mrs. Adams is a perfectly honest, industrious, painstaking person, who earns a good deal of money by washing and charing, and spends it in other luxuries than tidiness,—in green tea, and gin, and snuff. Her husband lives in a

great family, ten miles off. He is a capital gardener—or rather he would be so, if he were not too ambitious. He undertakes all things, and finishes none. But a smooth tongue, a knowing look, and a great capacity of labour, carry him through. Let him but like his ale and his master, and he will do work enough for four. Give him his own way, and his full quantum, and nothing comes amiss to him.

Ah, May is bounding forward! Her silly heart leaps at the sight of the old place—and so in good truth does mine. What a pretty place it was—or rather, how pretty I thought it! I suppose I should have thought any place so where I had spent eighteen happy years. But it was really pretty. A large, heavy, white house, in the simplest style, surrounded by fine oaks and elms, and tall massy plantations shaded down into a beautiful lawn by wild overgrown shrubs, bowery acacias, ragged sweet-briars, promontories of dog-wood, and



Portugal laurel, and bays, overhung by laburnum and bird-cherry; a long piece of water letting light into the picture, and looking just like a natural stream, the banks as rude and wild as the shrubbery, interspersed with broom, and furze, and bramble, and pollard oaks covered with ivy and honeysuckle: the whole enclosed by an old mossy park paling, and terminating in a series of rich meadows, richly planted. This is an exact description of the

home which, three years ago, it nearly broke my heart to leave. What a tearing up by the root it was! I have pitied cabbage-plants and celery, and all transplantable things, ever since; though, in common with them, and with other vegetables, the first agony of transportation being over, I have taken such firm and tenacious hold of my new soil, that I would not for the world be pulled up again, even to be restored to the old beloved ground;—not even if its beauty were undiminished, which is by no means the case; for in those three years it has thrice changed masters, and every successive possessor has brought the curse of improvement upon the place: so that between filling up the water to cure dampness, cutting down trees to let in prospects, planting to keep them out, shutting up windows to darken the inside of the house (by which means one end looks precisely as an eight of spades would do that should have the misfortune to lose one of his corner pips), and building colonnades to lighten the out, added to a general clearance of pollards, and brambles, and ivy, and honeysuckles, and park palings, and irregular shrubs, the poor place is so transmogrified, that if it had its old looking-glass, the water, back again, it would not know its own face. And yet I love to haunt round about it: so does May. Her particular attraction is a certain broken bank full of rabbit-burrows, into which she insinuates her long pliant head and neck, and tears her pretty feet by vain scratchings: mine is a warm sunny hedgerow, in the same remote field, famous for early flowers. Never was a spot more variously flowery: primroses yellow, lilac, white, violets of either hue, cowslips, oxlips, arums, orchises, wild hyacinths, ground ivy, pansies, strawberries, heart's-ease, formed a small part of the Flora of that wild hedgerow. How profusely they covered the sunny open

slope under the weeping birch, "the lady of the woods"—and how often have I started to see the early innocent brown snake, who loved the spot as well as I did, winding along the young blossoms, or rustling amongst the fallen leaves! There are primrose-leaves already, and short green buds, but no flowers; not even in that furze cradle so full of roots, where they used to blow as in a basket. No, my May, no rabbits! no primroses! We may as well get over the gate into the woody winding lane, which will bring us home again.

Here we are making the best of our way between the old elms that arch so solemnly overhead, dark and sheltered even now. They say that a spirit haunts this deep pool—a white lady without a head. I cannot say that I have seen her, often as I have paced this lane at deep midnight to hear the nightingales, and look at the glow-worms;—but there, better and rarer than a thousand ghosts, dearer even than nightingales or glow-worms, there is a primrose, the first of the year; a

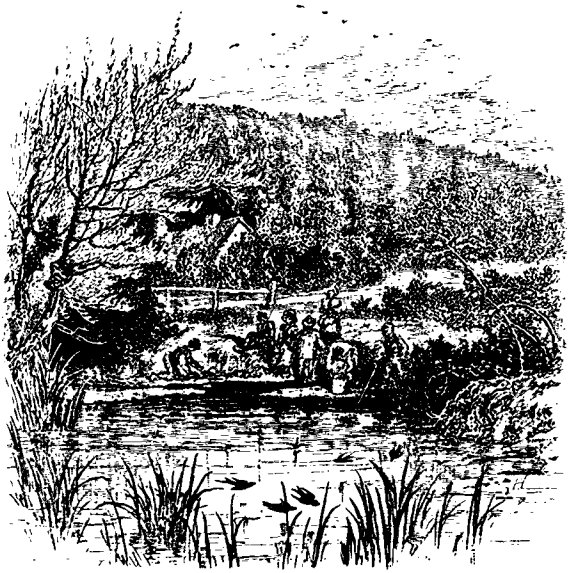
tuft of primroses, springing in yonder sheltered nook, from the mossy roots of an old willow, and living again in the clear bright pool. Oh, how beautiful they are—three fully blown, and two bursting buds! How glad I am I came this way! They are not to be reached. Even Jack Rapley's love of the difficult and the unattainable would fail him here: May herself could not stand on that steep bank. So much the better. Who would wish to disturb them? There they live in their innocent and fragrant beauty, sheltered from the storms, and rejoicing in the sunshine, and looking as if they could feel their happiness. Who would disturb them? Oh, how glad I am I came this way home!

VIOLETING.

MARCH 27th.—It is a dull grey morning, with a dewy feeling in the air; fresh, but not windy; cool, but not cold;—the very day for a person newly arrived from the heat, the glare, the noise, and the fever of London, to plunge into the remotest labyrinths of the country, and regain the repose of mind, the calmness of heart, which has been lost in that great Babel. I must go violeting—it is a necessity—and I must go alone: the sound of a voice, even my Lizzy's, the touch of Mayflower's head, even the bounding of her elastic foot, would disturb the serenity of feeling which I am trying to recover. I shall go quite alone, with my little basket, twisted like a bee-hive, which I love so well, because *she* gave it to me, and keep sacred to violets and to those whom I love; and I shall get out of the high road the moment I can. I would not meet any one just now, even of those whom I best like to meet.

Ha!—Is not that group—a gentleman on a blood horse, a lady keeping pace with him so gracefully and easily—see how prettily her veil waves in the wind created by her own rapid motion!—and that gay, gallant boy, on the gallant white Arabian, curveting at their side, but ready to spring before them every instant—is not that chivalrous-looking party, Mr. and Mrs. M. and dear B.? No! the servant is in a different livery. It is some of the ducal family, and one of their young Etonians.

I may go on. I shall meet no one now; for I have fairly left the road, and am crossing the lea by one of those wandering paths, amidst the gorse and the heath and the low broom, which the sheep and lambs have made—a path turfy, elastic, thymy, and sweet even at this season.

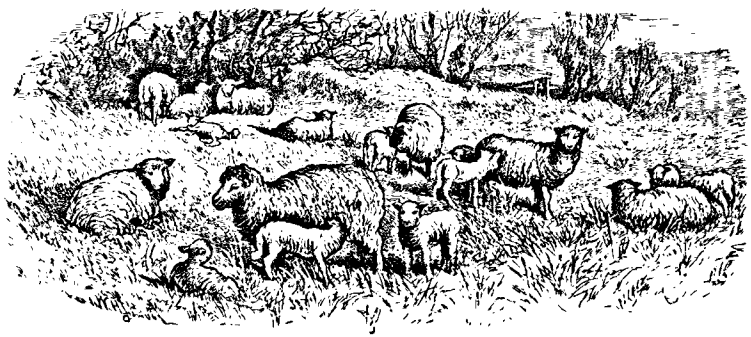


We have the good fortune to live in an unenclosed parish, and may thank the wise obstinacy of two or three sturdy farmers, and the lucky unpopularity of a ranting madcap lord of the manor, for preserving the delicious green patches, the islets of wilderness amidst cultivation, which form perhaps the peculiar beauty of English scenery. The common that I am passing now—the lea, as it is called—is one of the loveliest of these favoured spots. It is a little sheltered scene, retiring, as it were, from the village; sunk amidst higher lands, hills would be almost too grand a word; edged on one side by one gay high road, and intersected

by another; and surrounded by a most picturesque confusion of meadows, cottages, farms, and orchards; with a great pond in one corner, unusually bright and clear, giving a delightful cheerfulness and daylight to the picture. The swallows haunt that pond; so do the children. There is a merry group round it now; I have seldom seen it without one. Children love water, clear, bright, sparkling water; it excites and feeds their curiosity; it is motion and life.

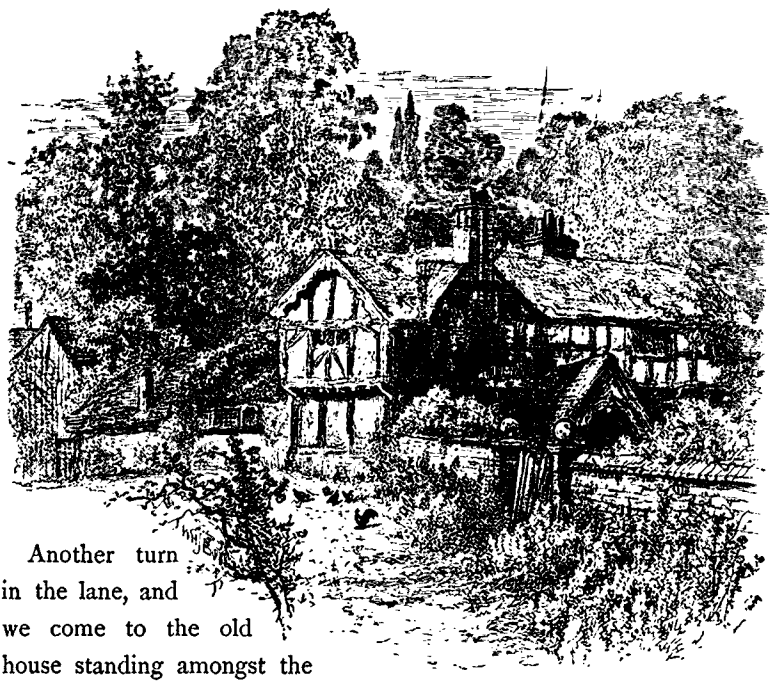
The path that I am treading leads to a less lively spot, to that large heavy building on one side of the common, whose solid wings, jutting out far beyond the main body, occupy three sides of a square, and give a cold shadowy look to the court. On one side is a gloomy garden, with an old man digging in it, laid out in straight dark beds of vegetables, potatoes, cabbages, onions, beans; all earthy and mouldy as a newly dug grave. Not a flower or a flowering shrub! Not a rose-tree or a currant-bush! Nothing but for sober melancholy use. Oh how different from the long irregular slips of the cottage-gardens, with their gay bunches of polyanthuses and crocuses, their wall-flowers, sending sweet odours through the narrow casement, and their gooseberry-trees bursting into a brilliancy of leaf, whose vivid greenness has the effect of a blossom on the eye! Oh how different! On the other side of this gloomy abode is a meadow of that deep intense emerald hue, which denotes the presence of stagnant water, surrounded by willows at regular distances, and, like the garden, separated from the common by a wide moat-like ditch. That is the parish workhouse. All about it is solid, substantial, useful;—but so dreary! so cold! so dark! There are children in the court, and yet all is silent. I always hurry past that place as if it were a prison. Restraint, sickness, age, extreme poverty, misery, which I have no power to remove or alleviate,—these are the ideas, the feelings, which the sight of those walls excites; yet, perhaps, if not certainly, they contain less of that extreme desolation than the morbid fancy is apt to paint. There will be found order, cleanliness,

food, clothing, warmth, refuge for the homeless, medicine and attendance for the sick, rest and sufficiency for old age, and sympathy, the true and active sympathy which the poor show to the poor, for the unhappy. There may be worse places than a parish workhouse—and yet I hurry past it. The feeling, the prejudice will not be controlled.



The end of the dreary garden edges off into a close-sheltered lane, wandering and winding, like a rivulet, in gentle "sinuosities," (to use a word once applied by Mr. Wilberforce to the Thames at Henley,) amidst green meadows, all alive with cattle, sheep, and beautiful lambs, in the very spring and pride of their tottering prettiness: or fields of arable land, more lively still with troops of stooping bean-setters, women and children, in all varieties of costume and colour; and ploughs and harrows, with their whistling boys and steady carters, going through, with a slow and plodding industry, the main business of this busy season. What work bean-setting is! What a reverse of the position assigned to man to distinguish him from

the beasts of the field! Only think of stooping for six, eight, ten hours a day, drilling holes in the earth with a little stick, and then dropping in the beans one by one. They are paid according to the quantity they plant; and some of the poor women used to be accused of clumping them—that is to say, of dropping more than one bean into a hole. It seems to me, considering the temptation, that not to clump is to be at the very pinnacle of human virtue.

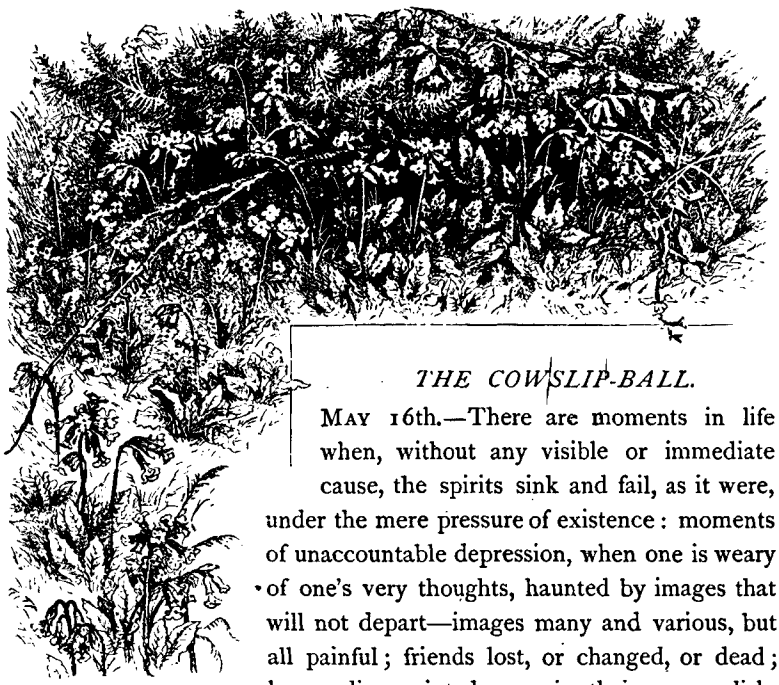


Another turn in the lane, and we come to the old house standing amongst the high elms—the old farm-house, which always, I don't know why, carries back my imagination to Shakspeare's days. It is a long, low, irregular building, with one room, at an angle from the house, covered

with ivy, fine white-veined ivy; the first floor of the main building projecting and supported by oaken beams, and one of the windows below, with its old casement and long narrow panes, forming the half of a shallow hexagon. A porch, with seats in it, surmounted by a pinnacle, pointed roofs, and clustered chimneys, complete the picture. Alas! it is little else but a picture! The very walls are crumbling to decay under a careless landlord and a ruined tenant.

Now a few yards farther, and I reach the bank. Ah! I smell them already—their exquisite perfume steams and lingers in this moist heavy air. Through this little gate, and along the green south bank of this green wheat-field, and they burst upon me, the lovely violets, in tenfold loveliness! The ground is covered with them, white and purple, enamelling the short dewy grass, looking but the more vividly coloured under the dull, leaden sky. There they lie by hundreds, by thousands. In former years I have been used to watch them from the tiny green bud, till one or two stole into bloom. They never came on me before in such a sudden and luxuriant glory of simple beauty,—and I do really owe one pure and genuine pleasure to feverish London! How beautifully they are placed too, on this sloping bank, with the palm branches waving over them, full of early bees, and mixing their honeyed scent with the more delicate violet odour! How transparent and smooth and lusty are the branches, full of sap and life! And there, just by the old mossy root, is a superb tuft of primroses, with a yellow butterfly hovering over them, like a flower floating on the air. What happiness to sit on this turfy knoll, and fill my basket with the blossoms! What a renewal of heart and mind! To inhabit such a scene of peace and sweetness is again to be fearless, gay and gentle as a child. Then it is that thought becomes poetry, and feeling religion. Then it is that we are happy and good. Oh that my whole life could pass so, floating on blissful and innocent sensation, enjoying in peace and gratitude the common blessings of Nature, thankful above all for the simple habits, the

healthful temperament, which render them so dear! Alas! who may dare expect a life of such happiness? But I can at least snatch and prolong the fleeting pleasure, can fill my basket with pure flowers, and my heart with pure thoughts; can gladden my little home with their sweetness; can divide my treasures with one, a dear one, who cannot seek them; can see them when I shut my eyes; and dream of them when I fall asleep.



THE COWSLIP-BALL.

MAY 16th.—There are moments in life when, without any visible or immediate cause, the spirits sink and fail, as it were, under the mere pressure of existence: moments of unaccountable depression, when one is weary of one's very thoughts, haunted by images that will not depart—images many and various, but all painful; friends lost, or changed, or dead; hopes disappointed even in their accomplishment; fruitless regrets, powerless wishes, doubt and fear, and self-distrust, and self-disapprobation. They who have known these feelings, (and who is there so happy as not to have known some of them?) will understand why Alfieri became powerless, and Froissart dull; and why even needle-work, the most effectual sedative, that grand soother and composer of woman's distress, fails to comfort me to-day. I will go out into the air this cool, pleasant afternoon, and try what that will do. I fancy that exercise, or exertion of any kind, is the true specific for nervousness. "Fling but a stone, the giant dies." I will go to the meadows, the beautiful meadows! and I will have my materials of happiness, Lizzy and May, and a basket for flowers, and we will make a

cowslip-ball. "Did you ever see a cowslip-ball, my Lizzy?"—"No."—"Come away, then; make haste! run, Lizzy!"

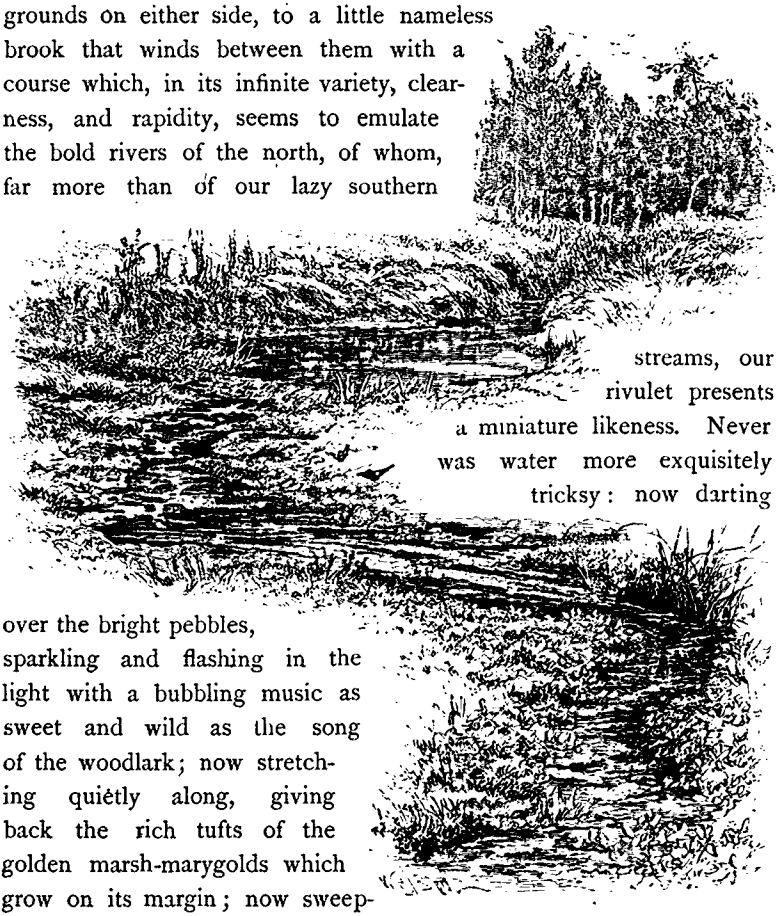
And on we go, fast, fast! down the road, across the lea, past the workhouse, along by the great pond, till we slide into the deep narrow lane, whose hedges seem to meet over the water, and win our way to the little farm-house at the end. "Through the farm-yard, Lizzy; over the gate; never mind the cows; they are quiet enough."—"I don't

mind 'em," said Miss Lizzy, boldly and truly, and with a proud affronted air, displeased at being thought to mind anything, and showing by her attitude and manner some design of proving her courage by an attack on the largest of the herd, in the shape of a pull by the tail. "I don't mind 'em."—"I know you don't, Lizzy; but let them alone, and don't chase the turkey-cock. Come to me, my dear!" and, for a wonder, Lizzy came.

In the meantime, my other pet, Mayflower, had also gotten into a scrape. She had driven about a huge unwieldy sow, till the animal's grunting had disturbed the repose of a still more enormous Newfoundland dog, the guardian of the yard. Out he sallied, growling, from the depth of his kennel, erecting his tail, and shaking his long chain. May's attention was instantly diverted from the sow to this new playmate, friend or foe, she cared not which; and he of the kennel, seeing his charge unhurt, and out of danger, was at leisure to observe the charms of his fair enemy, as she frolicked round him, always beyond the reach

of his chain, yet always, with the natural instinctive coquetry of her sex, alluring him to the pursuit which she knew to be vain. I never saw a prettier flirtation. At last the noble animal, wearied out, retired to the inmost recesses of his habitation, and would not even approach her when she stood right before the entrance. "You are properly served, May. Come along, Lizzy. Across this wheat-field, and now over the gate. Stop! let me lift you down. No jumping, no breaking of necks, Lizzy!" And here we are in the meadows, and out of the world; Robinson Crusoe, in his lonely island, had scarcely a more complete, or a more beautiful solitude.

These meadows consist of a double row of small enclosures of rich grass-land, a mile or two in length, sloping down from high arable grounds on either side, to a little nameless brook that winds between them with a course which, in its infinite variety, clearness, and rapidity, seems to emulate the bold rivers of the north, of whom, far more than of our lazy southern



streams, our rivulet presents a miniature likeness. Never was water more exquisitely tricksy: now darting over the bright pebbles, sparkling and flashing in the light with a bubbling music as sweet and wild as the song of the woodlark; now stretching quietly along, giving back the rich tufts of the golden marsh-marygolds which grow on its margin; now sweeping round a fine reach of green grass, rising steeply into a high mound, a mimic promontory, whilst the other side sinks softly away, like some tiny bay, and the water flows between, so clear, so wide,

so shallow, that Lizzy, longing for adventure, is sure she could cross unwetted; now dashing through two sand-banks, a torrent deep and narrow, which May clears at a bound; now sleeping, half hidden, beneath the alders, and hawthorns, and wild roses, with which the banks are so profusely and variously fringed, whilst flags, lilies, and other aquatic plants, almost cover the surface of the stream. In good truth, it is a beautiful brook, and one that Walton himself might have sitten by and loved, for trout are there; we see them as they dart up the stream, and hear and start at the sudden plunge when they spring to the surface for the summer flies. Izaak Walton would have loved our brook and our quiet meadows; they breathe the very spirit of his own peacefulness, a soothing quietude that sinks into the soul. There is no path through them, not one; we might wander a whole spring day, and not see a trace of human habitation. They belong to a number of small proprietors, who allow each other access through their respective grounds, from pure kindness and neighbourly feeling; a privilege never abused: and the fields on the other side of the water are reached by a rough plank, or a tree thrown across, or some such homely bridge. We ourselves possess one of the most beautiful; so that the strange pleasure of property, that instinct which makes Lizzy delight in her broken doll, and May in the bare bone which she has pilfered from the kennel of her recreant admirer of Newfoundland, is added to the other charms of this enchanting scenery; a strange pleasure it is, when one so poor as I can feel it! Perhaps it is felt most by the poor, with the rich it may be less intense—too much diffused and spread out, becoming thin by expansion, like leaf-gold; the little of the poor may be not only more precious, but more pleasant to them: certain that bit of grassy and blossomy earth, with its green knolls and tufted bushes, its old pollards wreathed with ivy, and its bright and babbling waters, is very dear to me. But I must always have loved these meadows, so fresh, and cool, and delicious to the eye and to the tread, full of cowslips, and of all vernal flowers:

Shakspeare's Song of Spring bursts irrepressibly from our lips as we step on them.

"When daisies pied, and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver white,
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue,
Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then on every tree—"

"Cuckoo! cuckoo!" cried Lizzy, breaking in with her clear childish voice; and immediately, as if at her call, the real bird, from a neighbouring tree, (for these meadows are dotted with timber like a park,) began to echo my lovely little girl, "cuckoo! cuckoo!" I have a prejudice very unpastoral and unpoetical (but I cannot help it, I have many such) against this "harbinger of spring." His note is so monotonous, so melancholy; and then the boys mimic him; one hears "cuckoo!

cuckoo!" in dirty streets, amongst smoky houses, and the bird is hated for faults not his own. But prejudices of taste, likings and dislikings, are not always vanquished by reason; so, to escape the serenade from the tree, which promised to be of considerable duration, (when once that eternal song begins, on it goes ticking like a clock,)—to escape that noise I determined to excite another, and challenged Lizzy to a cowslip-gathering; a trial of skill and speed, to see which should soonest fill her basket. My stratagem succeeded completely. What scrambling, what shouting, what glee from Lizzy! twenty cuckoos might have sung unheard whilst she was pulling her own flowers, and stealing mine, and laughing, screaming, and talking through all.

At last the baskets were filled, and Lizzy declared victor: and down we sat, on the brink of the stream, under a spreading hawthorn, just disclosing its own pearly buds, and surrounded with the rich and enamelled flowers of the wild hyacinth, blue and white, to make our cowslip-ball. Every one knows the process: to nip off the tuft of flowrets just below the top of the stalk, and hang each cluster nicely balanced across a riband, till you have a long string like a garland; then to press them closely together and tie them tightly up. We went on very prosperously, *considering;* as people say of a young lady's drawing, or a Frenchman's English, or a woman's tragedy, or of the poor little dwarf who works without fingers, or the ingenious sailor who writes with his toes, or generally of any performance which is accomplished by means seemingly inadequate to its production. To be sure we met with a few accidents. First, Lizzy spoiled nearly all her cow-

slips by snapping them off too short; so there was a fresh gathering; in the next place May overset my full basket, and sent the blossoms floating, like so many fairy favours, down the brook; then, when we were going on pretty steadily, just as we had made a superb wreath, and were thinking of tying it together, Lizzy, who held the riband, caught a glimpse of a gorgeous butterfly, all brown and red and purple, and skipping off to pursue the new object, let go her hold; so all our treasures were abroad again. At last, however, by dint of taking a branch of alder as a substitute for Lizzy, and hanging the basket in a pollard-ash, out of sight of May, the cowslip-ball was finished. What a concentration of fragrance and beauty it was! golden and sweet to satiety! rich to sight, and touch, and smell! Lizzy was enchanted and ran off with her prize, hiding amongst the trees in the very coyness of ecstasy, as if the human eye, even mine, would be a restraint upon her innocent raptures.

In the meanwhile I sat listening, not to my enemy the cuckoo, but to a whole concert of nightingales, scarcely interrupted by any meaner bird, answering and vying with each other in those short delicious strains which are to the ear as roses to the eye: those snatches of lovely sound which come across us as airs from heaven. Pleasant thoughts, delightful associations, awoke as I listened; and almost unconsciously I repeated to myself the beautiful story of the Lutist and the Nightingale, from Ford's Lover's Melancholy. Here it is. Is there in English poetry anything finer?

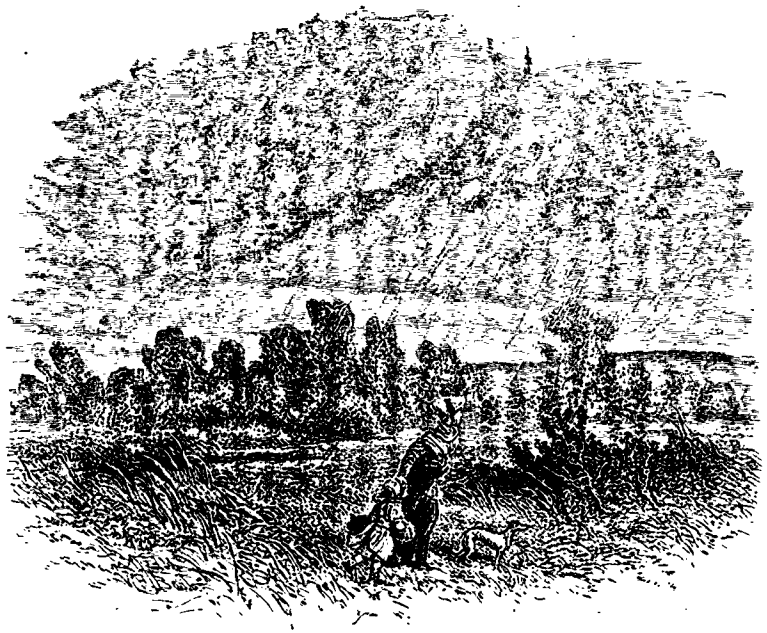
" Passing from Italy to Greece, the tales
Which poets of an elder time have feign'd
To glorify their Tempe, bred in me
Desire of visiting Paradise.
To Thessaly I came, and living private,
Without acquaintance of more sweet companions
Than the old inmates to my love, my thoughts,
I day by day frequented silent groves
And solitary walks. One morning early
This accident encounter'd me: I heard
The sweetest and most ravishing contention
That art and nature ever were at strife in.
A sound of music touch'd mine ears, or rather
Indeed entranced my soul: as I stole nearer,
Invited by the melody, I saw
This youth, this fair-faced youth, upon his lute
With strains of strange variety and harmony
Proclaiming, as it seem'd, so bold a challenge
To the clear choristers of the woods, the birds,
That as they flock'd about him, all stood silent,
Wondering at what they heard. I wonder'd too.
A nightingale,
Nature's best-skill'd musician, undertakes
The challenge; and for every several strain
The well-shaped youth could touch, she sang him down.
He could not run divisions with more art
Upon his quaking instrument than she,
The nightingale, did with her various notes
Reply to.
Some time thus spent, the young man grew at last
Into a pretty anger, that a bird,
Whom art had never taught cliffs, moods, or notes,
Should vie with him for mastery, whose study
Had busied many hours to perfect practice.
To end the controversy, in a rapture
Upon his instrument he plays so swiftly,
So many voluntaries, and so quick,
That there was curiosity and cunning,
Concord in discord, lines of differing method
Meeting in one full centre of delight.

> The bird (ordain'd to be
> Music's first martyr) strove to imitate
> These several sounds; which when her warbling throat
> Fail'd in, for grief down dropt she on his lute,
> And brake her heart. It was the quaintest sadness
> To see the conqueror upon her hearse
> To weep a funeral elegy of tears.
> He look'd upon the trophies of his art,
> Then sigh'd, then wiped his eyes; then sigh'd and cry'd,
> 'Alas! poor creature, I will soon revenge
> This cruelty upon the author of it.
> Henceforth this lute, guilty of innocent blood,
> Shall never more betray a harmless peace
> To an untimely end:' and in that sorrow,
> As he was pashing it against a tree,
> I suddenly stept in."

When I had finished the recitation of this exquisite passage, the sky, which had been all the afternoon dull and heavy, began to look more and more threatening; darker clouds, like wreaths of black smoke, flew across the dead leaden tint; a cooler, damper air blew over the meadows, and a few large heavy drops splashed in the water. "We shall have a storm. Lizzy! May! where are ye? Quick, quick, my Lizzy! run, run! faster, faster!"

And off we ran; Lizzy not at all displeased at the thoughts of a wetting, to which indeed she is almost as familiar as a duck; May, on the other hand, peering up at the weather, and shaking her pretty ears with manifest dismay. Of all animals, next to a cat, a greyhound dreads rain. She might have escaped it; her light feet would have borne her home long before the shower; but May is too faithful for that, too true a comrade, understands too well the laws of good-fellowship; so she waited for us. She did, to be sure, gallop on before, and then stop and look back, and beckon, as it were, with some scorn in her black eyes at the slowness of our progress. We in the meanwhile got on as fast as we could, encouraging and reproaching each other.

"AND DOWN WE SAT, ON THE BRINK OF THE STREAM, UNDER A SPREADING HAWTHORN."



"Faster, my Lizzy! Oh, what a bad runner!"—"Faster, faster! Oh, what a bad runner!" echoed my saucebox.—"You are so fat, Lizzy, you make no way!"—"Ah! who else is fat?" retorted the darling. Certainly her mother is right; I do spoil that child.

By this time we were thoroughly soaked, all three. It was a pelting shower, that drove through our thin summer clothing and poor May's short glossy coat in a moment. And then, when we were wet to the skin, the sun came out, actually the sun, as if to laugh at our plight; and then, more provoking still, when the sun was shining, and the shower over, came a maid and a boy to look after us, loaded with cloaks and umbrellas enough to fence us against a whole day's rain. Never mind! on we go, faster and faster; Lizzy obliged to be most

ignobly carried, having had the misfortune to lose a shoe in the mud, which we left the boy to look after.

Here we are at home—dripping; but glowing and laughing, and bearing our calamity most manfully. May, a dog of excellent sense, went instantly to bed in the stable, and is at this moment over head and ears in straw; Lizzy is gone to bed too, coaxed into that wise measure by a promise of tea and toast, and of not going home till to-morrow, and the story of Little Red Riding Hood; and I am enjoying the luxury of dry clothing by a good fire. Really getting wet through now and then is no bad thing, finery apart; for one should not like spoiling a new pelisse, or a handsome plume; but when there is nothing in question but a white gown and a straw bonnet, as was the case to-day, it is rather pleasant than not. The little chill refreshes, and our enjoyment of the subsequent warmth and dryness is positive and absolute. Besides, the stimulus and exertion do good to the mind as well as body. How melancholy I was all the morning! how cheerful I am now! Nothing like a shower-bath—a real shower-bath, such as Lizzy and May and I have undergone, to cure low spirits. Try it, my dear readers, if ever ye be nervous—I will answer for its success.

THE HARD SUMMER.

AUGUST 15th.—Cold, cloudy, windy, wet. Here we are, in the midst of the dog-days, clustering merrily round the warm hearth, like so many crickets, instead of chirruping in the green fields like that other merry insect the grasshopper; shivering under the influence of the *Jupiter Pluvius* of England, the watery St. Swithin; peering at that scarce personage the sun, when he happens to make his appearance, as intently as astronomers look after a comet, or the common people stare at a balloon; exclaiming against the cold weather, just as we used to exclaim against the warm. "What a change from last year!" is the first sentence you hear, go where you may. Everybody remarks it, and everybody complains of it; and yet in my mind it has its advantages, or at least its compensations, as everything in nature has, if we would only take the trouble to seek for them.

Last year, in spite of the love which we are now pleased to profess towards that ardent luminary, not one of the sun's numerous admirers had courage to look him in the face: there was no bearing the world till he had said "Good-night" to it. Then we might stir; then we began to wake and to live. All day long we languished under his

influence in a strange dreaminess, too hot to work, too hot to read, too hot to write, too hot even to talk; sitting hour after hour in a green arbour, embowered in leafiness, letting thought and fancy float as they would. Those day-dreams were pretty things in their way; there is no denying that. But then, if one half of the world were to dream through a whole summer, like the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood, what would become of the other?

The only office requiring the slightest exertion, which I performed in that warm weather, was watering my flowers. Common sympathy called for that labour. The poor things withered, and faded, and pined away; they almost, so to say, panted for drought. Moreover, if I had not watered them myself, I suspect that no one else would; for water last year was nearly as precious hereabout as wine. Our land springs were dried up; our wells were exhausted; our deep ponds were dwindling into mud; and geese, and ducks, and pigs, and laundresses, used to look with a jealous and suspicious eye on the few and scanty half buckets of that impure element, which my trusty lacquey was fain to filch for my poor geraniums and campanulas and tuberoses. We were forced to smuggle them in through my faithful adherent's territories, the stable, to avoid lectures within doors; and at last even that resource failed; my garden, my blooming garden, the joy of my eyes, was forced to go waterless like its neighbours, and became shrivelled, scorched, and sunburnt, like them. It really went to my heart to look at it.

On the other side of the house matters were still worse. What a dusty world it was, when about sunset we became cool enough to creep into it! Flowers in the court looking fit for a *hortus siccus;* mummies of plants, dried as in an oven; hollyhocks, once pink, turned into Quakers; cloves smelling of dust. Oh dusty world! May herself looked of that complexion; so did Lizzy; so did all the houses, windows, chickens, children, trees, and pigs in the village; so above all did the shoes. No foot could make three plunges into that abyss of pulverised

gravel, which had the impudence to call itself a hard road, without being clothed with a coat a quarter of an inch thick. Woe to white gowns! woe to black! Drab was your only wear.

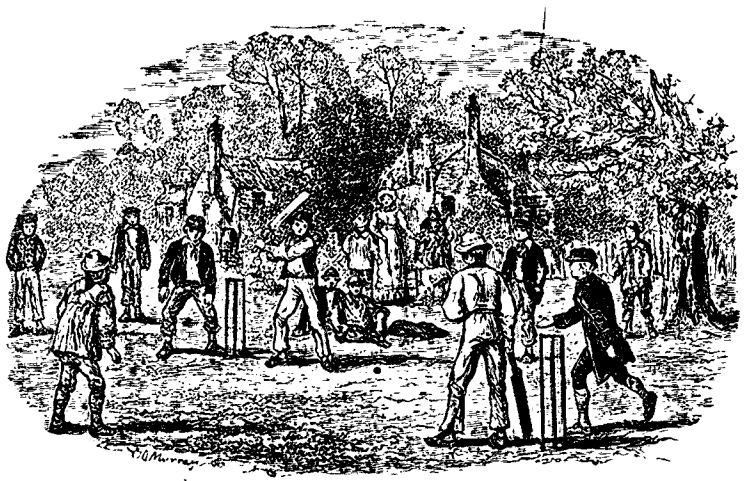
Then, when we were out of the street, what a toil it was to mount the hill, climbing with weary steps and slow upon the brown turf by the wayside, slippery, hot, and hard as a rock! And then if we happened to meet a carriage coming along the middle of the road,—the bottomless middle,—what a sandy whirlwind it was! What choking! what suffocation! No state could be more pitiable, except indeed that of the

travellers who carried this misery about with them. I shall never forget the plight in which we met the coach one evening in last August, full an hour after its time, steeds and driver, carriage and passengers, all one dust. The outsides, and the horses, and the coachman, seemed reduced to a torpid quietness, the resignation of despair. They had left off trying to better their condition, and taking refuge in a wise and patient hopelessness, bent to endure in silence the extremity of ill. The six insides, on the contrary, were still fighting against their fate, vainly struggling to ameliorate their hapless destiny. They were visibly grumbling at the weather, scolding the dust, and heating themselves

like a furnace, by striving against the heat. How well I remember the fat gentleman without his coat, who was wiping his forehead, heaving up his wig, and certainly uttering that English ejaculation, which, to our national reproach, is the phrase of our language best known on the continent. And that poor boy, red-hot, all in a flame, whose mamma, having divested her own person of all superfluous apparel, was trying to relieve his sufferings by the removal of his neckerchief—an operation which he resisted with all his might. How perfectly I remember him, as well as the pale girl who sat opposite, fanning herself with her bonnet into an absolute fever! They vanished after awhile in their own dust; but I have them all before my eyes at this moment, a companion-picture to Hogarth's Afternoon, a standing lesson to the grumblers at cold summers.

For my part, I really like this wet season. It keeps us within, to be sure, rather more than is quite agreeable; but then we are at least awake and alive there, and the world out of doors is so much the pleasanter when we can get abroad. Everything does well, except those fastidious bipeds, men and women; corn ripens, grass grows, fruit is plentiful; there is no lack of birds to eat it, and there has not been such a wasp-season these dozen years. My garden wants no watering, and is more beautiful than ever, beating my old rival in that primitive art, the pretty wife of the little mason, out an out. Measured with mine, her flowers are nought. Look at those hollyhocks, like pyramids of roses; those garlands of the convolvulus major

of all colours, hanging around that tall pole, like the wreathy hop-bine; those magnificent dusky cloves, breathing of the Spice Islands; those flaunting double dahlias; those splendid scarlet geraniums, and those fierce and warlike flowers the tiger-lilies. Oh how beautiful they are! Besides, the weather clears sometimes—it has cleared this evening; and here are we, after a merry walk up the hill, almost as quick as in the winter, bounding lightly along the bright green turf of the pleasant common, enticed by the gay shouts of a dozen clear young voices, to linger awhile, and see the boys play at cricket.

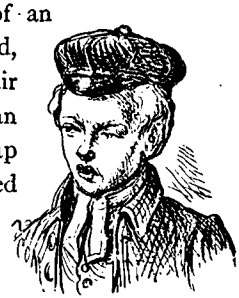


I plead guilty to a strong partiality towards that unpopular class of beings, country boys: I have a large acquaintance amongst them, and I can almost say, that I know good of many and harm of none. In general they are an open, spirited, good-humoured race, with a proneness to embrace the pleasures and eschew the evils of their condition, a capacity for happiness, quite unmatched in man, or woman, or girl.

They are patient, too, and bear their fate as scape-goats, (for all sins whatsoever are laid as matters of course to their door, whether at home or abroad,) with amazing resignation; and, considering the many lies of which they are the objects, they tell wonderfully few in return. The worst that can be said of them is, that they seldom, when grown to man's estate, keep the promise of their boyhood; but that is a fault to come—a fault that may not come, and ought not to be anticipated. It is astonishing how sensible they are to notice from their betters, or those whom they think such. I do not speak of money, or gifts, or praise, or the more coarse and common briberies—they are more delicate courtiers; a word, a nod, a smile, or the mere calling of them by their names, is enough to ensure their hearts and their services. Half-a-dozen of them, poor urchins, have run away now to bring us chairs from their several homes. "Thank you, Joe Kirby!—you are always first—yes, that is just the place—I shall see everything there. Have you been in yet, Joe?"—"No, ma'am! I go in next."—"Ah, I am glad of that—and now's the time. Really that was a pretty ball of Jem Eusden's!—I was sure it would go to the wicket. Run, Joe! They are waiting for you" There was small need to bid Joe Kirby make haste; I think he is, next to a race-horse, or a greyhound, or a deer, the fastest creature that runs —the most completely alert and active. Joe is mine especial friend, and leader of the "tender juveniles," as Joel Brent is of the adults. In both instances this post of honour was gained by merit, even more remarkably so in Joe's case than in Joel's; for Joe is a less boy than many of his companions, (some of whom are fifteeners and sixteeners, quite as tall and nearly as old as Tom Coper,) and a poorer than all, as may be conjectured from the lamentable state of that patched round frock, and the ragged condition of those unpatched shoes, which would encumber, if anything could, the light feet that wear

them. But why should I lament the poverty that never troubles him? Joe is the merriest and happiest creature that ever lived twelve years in this wicked world. Care cannot come near him. He hath a perpetual smile on his round, ruddy face, and a laugh in his hazel eye, that drives the witch away. He works at yonder farm on the top of the hill, where he is in such repute for intelligence and good-humour, that he has the honour of performing all the errands of the house, of helping the maid, and the mistress, and the master, in addition to his own stated office of carter's boy. There he works hard from five till seven, and then he comes here to work still harder under the name of play—batting, bowling, and fielding, as if for life, filling the place of four boys; being, at a pinch, a whole eleven. The late Mr. Knyvett, the King's organist, who used in his own person to sing twenty parts at once of the Hallelujah chorus, so that you would have thought he had a nest of nightingales in his throat, was but a type of Joe Kirby. There is a sort of ubiquity about him; he thinks nothing of being in two places at once, and for pitching a ball, William Grey himself is nothing to him. It goes straight to the mark like a bullet. He is king of the cricketers from eight to sixteen, both inclusive, and an excellent ruler he makes. Nevertheless, in the best-ordered states there will be grumblers, and we have an opposition here in the shape of Jem Eusden.

Jem Eusden is a stunted lad of thirteen, or thereabouts, lean, small, and short, yet strong and active. His face is of an extraordinary ugliness, colourless, withered, haggard, with a look of extreme age, much increased by hair so light that it might rather pass for white than flaxen. He is constantly arrayed in the blue cap and old-fashioned coat, the costume of an endowed school to which he belongs; where he sits still all day, and rushes into the field at night, fresh, untired, and ripe for action, to scold, and brawl,



and storm, and bluster. He hates Joe Kirby, whose immoveable good-humour, broad smiles, and knowing nods, must certainly be very provoking to so fierce and turbulent a spirit; and he has himself (being, except by rare accident, no great player) the preposterous ambition of wishing to be manager of the sports. In short, he is a demagogue in embryo, with every quality necessary to a splendid success in that vocation,—a strong voice, a fluent utterance, an incessant iteration, and a frontless impudence. He is a great "scholar," too, to use the country phrase; his "piece," as our village schoolmaster terms a fine sheet of flourishing writing, something between a valentine and a sampler, enclosed within a border of little coloured prints—his last, I remember, was encircled by an engraved history of Moses, beginning at the finding in the bulrushes, with Pharaoh's daughter dressed in a rose-coloured gown and blue feathers—his piece is not only the admiration of the school, but of the parish, and is sent triumphantly round from house to house at Christmas, to extort halfpence and sixpences from all encouragers of learning—*Montem* in miniature. The Mosaic history was so successful, that the produce enabled Jem to purchase a bat and ball, which, besides adding to his natural arrogance, (for the little pedant actually began to mutter against being eclipsed by a dunce, and went so far as to challenge Joe Kirby to a trial in Practice, or the Rule of Three,) gave him, when compared with the general poverty, a most unnatural preponderance in the cricket state. He had the ways and means in his hands—(for alas! the hard winter had made sad havoc among the bats, and the best ball was a bad one)—he had the ways and means, could withhold the supplies, and his party was beginning to wax strong, when Joe received a present of two bats and a ball for the youngsters in general and himself in particular—and Jem's adherents left him on the spot—they ratted, to a man, that very evening. Notwithstanding this desertion, their forsaken leader has in nothing relaxed from his pretensions, or his ill-humour. He still quarrels and brawls as

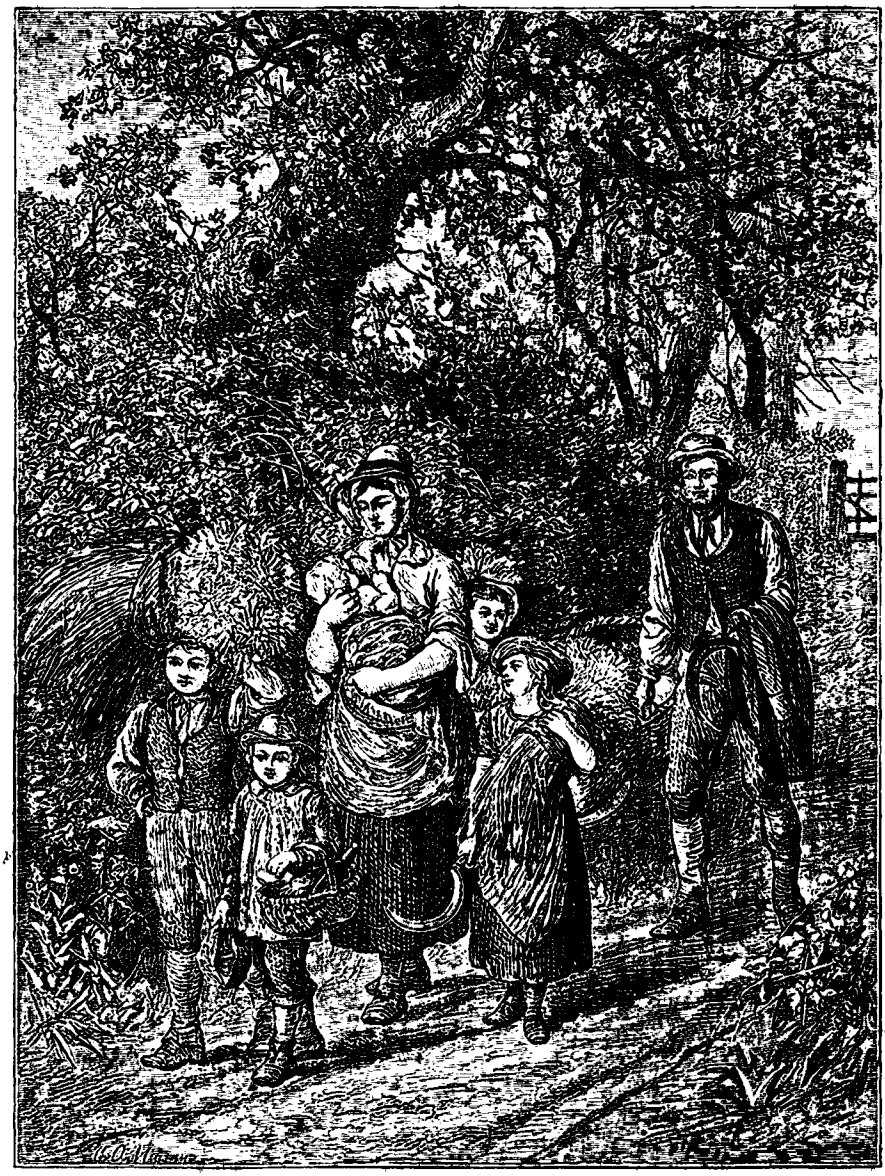
if he had a faction to back him, and thinks nothing of contending with both sides, the ins and the outs, secure of out-talking the whole field. He has been squabbling these ten minutes, and is just marching off now with his own bat (he has never deigned to use one of Joe's) in his hand. What an ill-conditioned hobgoblin it is! And yet there is something bold and sturdy about him too. I should miss Jem Eusden.

Ah, there is another deserter from the party! my friend the little hussar—I do not know his name, and call him after his cap and jacket. He is a very remarkable person, about the age of eight years, the youngest piece of gravity and dignity I ever encountered; short, and square, and upright, and slow, with a fine bronzed flat visage, resembling those convertible signs the Broad-Face and the Saracen's Head, which, happening to be next-door neighbours in the town of B., I never know apart, resembling, indeed, any face that is open-eyed and immoveable—the very sign of a boy! He stalks about with his hands in his breeches pocket, like a piece of machinery; sits leisurely down when he ought to field, and never gets farther in batting than to stop the ball. His is the only voice never heard in the *mêlée:* I doubt, indeed, if he have one, which may be partly the reason of a circumstance that I record to his honour, his fidelity to Jem Eusden, to whom he has adhered through every change of fortune, with a tenacity proceeding perhaps from an instinctive consciousness that that loquacious leader talks enough for two. He is the only thing resembling a follower that our demagogue possesses, and is cherished by him accordingly. Jem quarrels for him, scolds for him, pushes for him; and but for Joe Kirby's invincible good-humour, and a just discrimination of the innocent from the guilty, the activity of Jem's friendship would get the poor hussar ten drubbings a day.

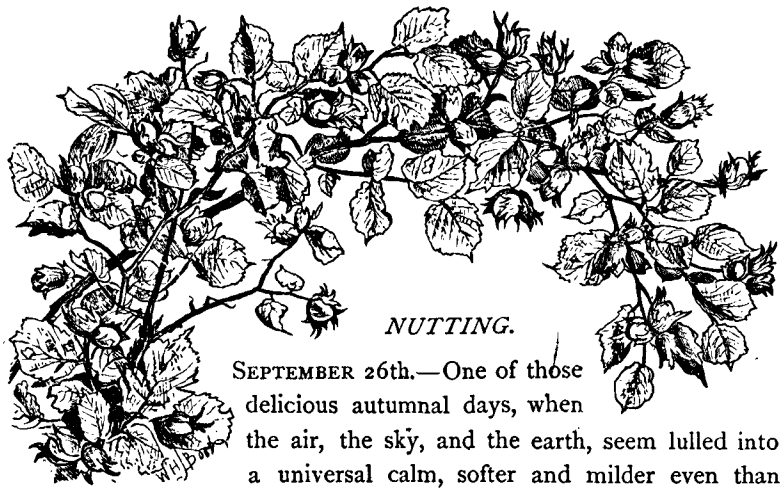
But it is growing late. The sun has set a long time. Only see what a gorgeous colouring has spread itself over those parting masses of clouds in the west,—what a train of rosy light! We shall have a fine sunshiny day to-morrow,—a blessing not to be undervalued, in spite of my late vituperation of heat. Shall we go home now? And shall we take the longest but prettiest road, that by the green lanes? This way, to the left, round the corner of the common, past Mrs. Welles's cottage, and our path lies straight before us. How snug and comfortable that cottage looks! Its little yard all alive with the cow, and the mare, and the colt almost as large as the mare, and the young foal, and the great yard-dog, all so fat! Fenced in with hay-rick, and wheat-rick, and bean-stack, and backed by the long garden, the spacious drying-ground, the fine orchard, and that large field quartered into four different crops. How comfortable this cottage looks, and how well the owners earn their comforts! They are the most prosperous pair in the parish—she a laundress with twenty times more work than she can do, unrivalled in

"THERE SHE STANDS AT THE SPRING, DIPPING UP WATER FOR TO-MORROW."

flounces and shirt-frills, and such delicacies of the craft: he, partly a farmer, partly a farmer's man, tilling his own ground, and then tilling other people's;—affording a proof, even in this declining age, when the circumstances of so many worthy members of the community seem to have "an alacrity in sinking," that it is possible to amend them by sheer industry. He, who was born in the workhouse, and bred up as a parish boy, has now, by mere manual labour, risen to the rank of a land-owner, pays rates and taxes, grumbles at the times, and is called Master Welles, —the title next to Mister—that by which Shakspeare was called;—what would man have more? His wife, besides being the best laundress in the county, is a comely woman still. There she stands at the spring, dipping up water for to-morrow,—the clear, deep, silent spring, which sleeps so peacefully under its high flowery bank, red with the tall spiral stalks of the foxglove and their rich pendent bells, blue with the beautiful forget-me-not, that gem-like blossom, which looks like a living jewel of turquoise and topaz. It is almost too late to see its beauty; and here is the pleasant shady lane, where the high elms will shut out the little twilight that remains. Ah, but we shall have the fairies' lamps to guide us, the stars of the earth, the glow-worms! Here they are, three almost together. Do you not see them? One seems tremulous, vibrating, as if on the extremity of a leaf of grass; the others are deeper in the hedge, in some green cell on which their light falls with an emerald lustre. I hope my friends the cricketers will not come this way home. I would not have the pretty creatures removed for more than I care to say, and in this matter I would hardly trust Joe Kirby—boys so love to stick them in their hats. But this lane is quite deserted. It is only a road from field to field. No one comes here at this hour. They are quite safe; and I shall walk here to-morrow and visit them again. And now, good night! beautiful insects, lamps of the fairies, good night!



"THE FATHER, MOTHER, AND CHILDREN RETURNING FROM THE WHEAT-FIELD."



NUTTING.

SEPTEMBER 26th.—One of those delicious autumnal days, when the air, the sky, and the earth, seem lulled into a universal calm, softer and milder even than May. We sallied forth for a walk in a mood congenial to the weather and the season, avoiding, by mutual consent, the bright and sunny common, and the gay high-road, and stealing through shady, unfrequented lanes, where we were not likely to meet any one,—not even the pretty family procession which in other years we used to contemplate with so much interest—the father, mother, and children, returning from the wheat-field, the little ones laden with bristling close-tied bunches of wheat-ears, their own gleanings, or a bottle and a basket which had contained their frugal dinner, whilst the mother would carry her babe hushing and lulling it, and the father and an elder child trudged after with the cradle, all seeming weary, and all happy. We shall not see such a procession as this to-day; for the harvest is nearly over, the fields are deserted, the silence may almost be felt. Except the wintry notes of the red-breast, Nature herself is mute. But how beautiful, how gentle, how harmonious, how rich! The rain has preserved to the herbage all the freshness and verdure of spring, and the

world of leaves has lost nothing of its midsummer brightness, and the hare-bell is on the banks, and the woodbine in the hedges, and the low furze, which the lambs cropped in the spring, has burst again into its golden blossoms.

All is beautiful that the eye can see; perhaps the more beautiful for being shut in with a forest-like closeness. We have no prospect in this labyrinth of lanes, cross-roads, mere cart-ways, leading to the innumerable little farms into which this part of the parish is divided. Up-hill

or down, these quiet woody lanes scarcely give us a peep at the world, except when, leaning over a gate, we look into one of the small enclosures, hemmed in with hedgerows, so closely set with growing timber, that the meadowy opening looks almost like a glade in a wood; or when some cottage, planted at a corner of one of the little greens formed by the meeting of these cross-ways, almost startles us by the unexpected sight of the dwellings of men in such a solitude. But that we have more of hill and dale, and that our cross-roads are excellent in

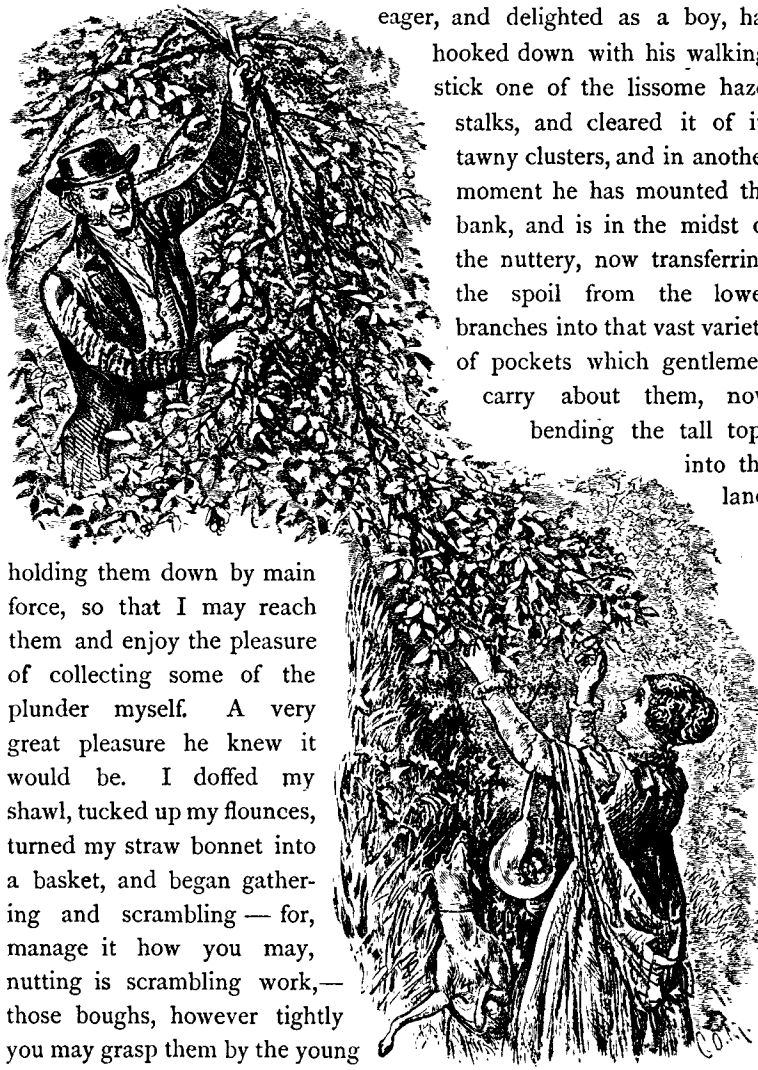
their kind, this side of our parish would resemble the description given of La Vendée, in Madame Laroche-Jacquelin's most interesting book. I am sure if wood can entitle a country to be called Le Bocage, none can have a better right to the name. Even this pretty snug farm-house on the hill-side, with its front covered with the rich vine, which goes wreathing up to the very top of the clustered chimney, and its sloping orchard full of fruit—even this pretty quiet nest can hardly peep out of its leaves. Ah! they are gathering in the orchard harvest. Look at that young rogue in the old mossy apple-tree—that great tree, bending with the weight of its golden-rennets—see how he pelts his little sister beneath with apples as red and as round as her own cheeks, while she, with her outstretched frock, is trying to catch them, and laughing and offering to pelt again as often as one bobs against her; and look at that still younger imp, who, as grave as a judge, is creeping on hands and knees under the tree, picking up the apples as they fall so deedily, and depositing them so honestly in the great basket on the grass, already fixed so firmly and opened so widely, and filled almost to overflowing by the brown rough fruitage of the golden-rennet's next neighbour the russeting; and see that smallest urchin of all, seated apart in infantine state on the turfy bank, with that toothsome piece of deformity

a crumpling in each hand, now biting from one sweet, hard, juicy morsel, and now from another. Is not that a pretty English picture? And then, farther up the orchard, that bold hardy lad, the eldest born, who has scaled (Heaven knows how) the tall, straight upper branch of that great pear-tree, and is sitting there as securely and as fearlessly, in as much real safety and apparent danger, as a sailor on the top-mast. Now he shakes the tree with a mighty swing that brings down a pelting shower of stony bergamots, which the father gathers rapidly up, whilst the mother can hardly assist for her motherly fear—a fear which only spurs the spirited boy to bolder ventures. Is not that a pretty picture? And they are such a handsome family, too, the Brookers. I do not know that there is any gipsy blood, but there is the true gipsy complexion, richly brown, with cheeks and lips so deeply red, black hair curling close to their heads in short crisp rings, white shining teeth—and such eyes!—That sort of beauty entirely eclipses your mere roses and lilies. Even Lizzy, the prettiest of fair children, would look poor and watery by the side of Willy Brooker, the sober little personage who is picking up the apples with his small chubby hands, and filling the basket so orderly, next to his father the most useful man in the field. "Willy!" He hears without seeing; for we are quite hidden by the high bank, and a spreading hawthorn bush that overtops it, though between the lower branches and the grass we have found a convenient peep-hole. "Willy!" The voice sounds to him like some fairy dream, and the black eyes are raised from the ground with sudden wonder, the long silky eyelashes thrown back till they rest on the delicate brow, and a deeper blush is burning in those dark cheeks, and a smile is dimpling about those scarlet lips. But the voice is silent now, and the little quiet boy, after a moment's pause, is gone coolly to work again. He is indeed a most lovely child. I think some day or other he must marry Lizzy; I shall propose the match to their respective mammas. At present the parties are rather too young for a wedding—the intended bridegroom being, as I should

judge, six, or thereabout, and the fair bride barely five,—but at least we might have a betrothment after the royal fashion,—there could be no harm in that. Miss Lizzy, I have no doubt, would be as demure and coquettish as if ten winters more had gone over her head, and poor Willy would open his innocent black eyes, and wonder what was going forward. They would be the very Oberon and Titania of the village, the fairy king and queen.

Ah! here is the hedge along which the periwinkle wreathes and twines so profusely, with its evergreen leaves shining like the myrtle, and its starry blue flowers. It is seldom found wild in this part of England; but, when we do meet with it, it is so abundant and so welcome,—the very robin-redbreast of flowers, a winter friend. Unless in those unfrequent frosts which destroy all vegetation, it blossoms from September to June, surviving the last lingering crane's bill, forerunning the earliest primrose, hardier even than the mountain daisy,—peeping out from beneath the snow, looking at itself in the ice, smiling through the tempests of life, and yet welcoming and enjoying the sunbeams. Oh, to be like that flower!

The little spring that has been bubbling under the hedge all along the hillside begins, now that we have mounted the eminence and are imperceptibly descending, to deviate into a capricious variety of clear deep pools and channels, so narrow and so choked with weeds that a child might overstep them. The hedge has also changed its character. It is no longer the close compact vegetable wall of hawthorn, and maple, and briar-roses, intertwined with bramble and woodbine, and crowned with large elms or thickly-set saplings. No! the pretty meadow which rises high above us, backed and almost surrounded by a tall coppice, needs no defence on our side but its own steep bank, garnished with tufts of broom, with pollard oaks wreathed with ivy, and here and there with long patches of hazel overhanging the water. "Ah, there are still nuts on that bough!" and in an instant my dear companion, active and

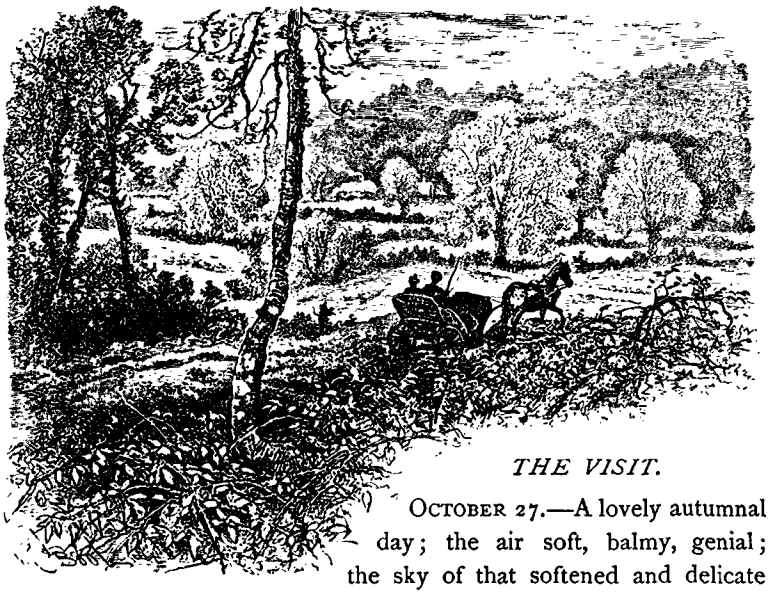


eager, and delighted as a boy, has hooked down with his walking-stick one of the lissome hazel stalks, and cleared it of its tawny clusters, and in another moment he has mounted the bank, and is in the midst of the nuttery, now transferring the spoil from the lower branches into that vast variety of pockets which gentlemen carry about them, now bending the tall tops into the lane, holding them down by main force, so that I may reach them and enjoy the pleasure of collecting some of the plunder myself. A very great pleasure he knew it would be. I doffed my shawl, tucked up my flounces, turned my straw bonnet into a basket, and began gathering and scrambling — for, manage it how you may, nutting is scrambling work,— those boughs, however tightly you may grasp them by the young

fragrant twigs and the bright green leaves, will recoil and burst away; but there is a pleasure even in that: so on we go, scrambling and gathering with all our might and all our glee. Oh what an enjoyment! All my life long I have had a passion for that sort of seeking which implies finding, (the secret, I believe, of the love of field-sports, which is in man's mind a natural impulse,)—therefore I love violeting,—therefore, when we had a fine garden, I used to love to gather strawberries, and cut asparagus, and, above all, to collect the filberts from the shrubberies: but this hedgerow nutting beats that sport all to nothing. That was a make-believe thing, compared with this; there was no surprise, no suspense, no unexpectedness—it was as inferior to this wild nutting, as the turning out of a bag-fox is to unearthing the fellow, in the eyes of a staunch fox-hunter.

Oh what an enjoyment this nut-gathering is! They are in such abundance, that it seems as if there were not a boy in the parish, nor a young man, nor a young woman,—for a basket of nuts is the universal tribute of country gallantry; our pretty damsel Harriet has had at least half-a-dozen this season; but no one has found out these. And they are so full too, we lose half of them from over-ripeness; they drop from the socket at the slightest motion. If we lose, there is one who finds. May is as fond of nuts as a squirrel, and cracks the shell and extracts the kernel with equal dexterity. Her white glossy head is upturned now to watch them as they fall. See how her neck is thrown back like that of a swan, and how beautifully her folded ears quiver with expectation, and how her quick eye follows the rustling noise, and her light feet dance and pat the ground, and leap up with eagerness, seeming almost sustained in the air, just as

I have seen her when Brush is beating a hedgerow, and she knows from his questing that there is a hare afoot. See, she has caught that nut just before it touched the water; but the water would have been no defence,—she fishes them from the bottom, she delves after them among the matted grass—even my bonnet—how beggingly she looks at that! "Oh what a pleasure nutting is!—Is it not, May? But the pockets are almost full, and so is the basket-bonnet, and that bright watch the sun says it is late; and after all it is wrong to rob the poor boys—is it not, May?"—May shakes her graceful head denyingly, as if she understood the question—"and we must go home now—must we not? But we will come nutting again some time or other—shall we not, my May?"

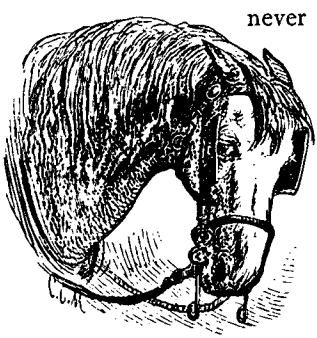


THE VISIT.

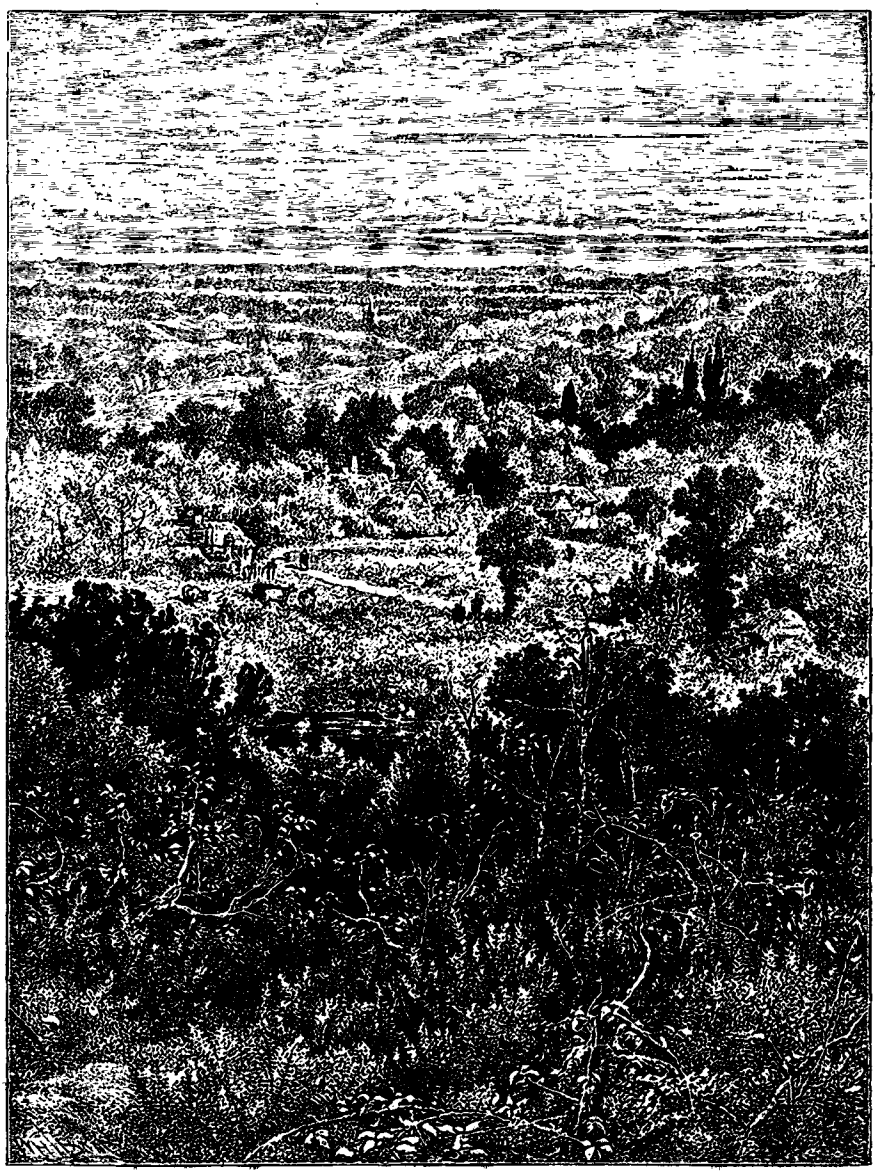
OCTOBER 27.—A lovely autumnal day; the air soft, balmy, genial; the sky of that softened and delicate blue upon which the eye loves to rest,—the blue which gives such relief to the rich beauty of the earth, all around glowing in the ripe and mellow tints of the most gorgeous of the seasons. Really such an autumn may well compensate our English climate for the fine spring of the south, that spring of which the poets talk, but which we so seldom enjoy. Such an autumn glows upon us like a splendid evening; it is the very sunset of the year; and I have been tempted forth into a wider range of enjoyment than usual. This *walk* (if I may use the Irish figure of speech called a bull) will be a *ride*. A very dear friend has beguiled me into accompanying her in her pretty equipage to her beautiful home, four miles off; and having sent forward in the style of a running footman the servant who had driven her, she assumes the reins, and off we set.

My fair companion is a person whom nature and fortune would have

spoiled if they could. She is one of those striking women whom a stranger cannot pass without turning to look again; tall and finely proportioned, with a bold Roman contour of figure and feature, a delicate English complexion, and an air of distinction altogether her own. Her beauty is duchess-like. She seems born to wear feathers and diamonds, and to form the grace and ornament of a court; and the noble frankness and simplicity of her countenance and manner confirm the impression. Destiny has, however, dealt more kindly by her. She is the wife of a rich country gentleman of high descent and higher attainments, to whom she is most devotedly attached,—the mother of a little girl as lovely as herself, and the delight of all who have the happiness of her acquaintance, to whom she is endeared not merely by her remarkable sweetness of temper and kindness of heart, but by the singular ingenuousness and openness of character which communicate an indescribable charm to her conversation. She is as transparent as water. You may see every colour, every shade of a mind as lofty and beautiful as her person. Talking with her is like being in the Palace of Truth described by Madame de Genlis; and yet so kindly are her feelings, so great her indulgence to the little failings and foibles of our common nature, so intense her sympathy with the wants, the wishes, the sorrows, and the happiness of her fellow-creatures, that, with all her frank-speaking, I never knew her make an enemy or lose a friend.



But we must get on. What would she say if she knew I was putting her into print? We must get on up the hill. Ah! that is precisely what we are not likely to do! This horse, this beautiful and high-bred horse, well fed, and fat and glossy, who stood prancing at our gate like an Arabian, has suddenly turned sulky. He does not indeed stand quite



"THE BEAUTIFUL PROSPECT THAT LAY BATHED IN GOLDEN SUNSHINE."

still, but his way of moving is little better—the slowest and most sullen of all walks. Even they who ply the hearse at funerals, sad-looking beasts who totter under black feathers, go faster. It is of no use to admonish him by whip, or rein, or word. The rogue has found out that it is a weak and tender hand that guides him now. Oh for one pull, one stroke of his old driver, the groom! how he would fly! But there is the groom half-a-mile before us, out of ear-shot, clearing the ground at a capital rate, beating us hollow. He has just turned the top of the hill;—and in a moment—aye, *now* he is out of sight, and will undoubtedly so continue till he meets us at the lawn gate. Well! there is no great harm. It is only prolonging the pleasure of enjoying together this charming scenery in fine weather. If once we make up our minds not to care how slow our steed goes, not to fret ourselves by vain exertions, it is no matter what his pace may be. There is little doubt of his getting home by sunset, and that will content us. He is, after all, a fine noble animal; and perhaps when he finds that we are determined to give him his way, he may relent and give us ours. All of his sex are sticklers for dominion, though, when it is undisputed, some of them are generous enough to abandon it. Two or three of the most discreet wives of my acquaintance contrive to manage their husbands sufficiently with no better secret than this seeming submission; and in our case the example has the more weight since we have no possible way of helping ourselves.

Thus philosophising, we reached the top of the hill, and viewed with "reverted eyes" the beautiful prospect that lay bathed in golden sunshine behind us. Cowper says, with that boldness of expressing in poetry the commonest and simplest feelings, which is perhaps one great secret of his originality,

> "Scenes must be beautiful, which, daily seen,
> Please daily, and whose novelty survives
> Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years."

Every day I walk up this hill—every day I pause at the top to admire the broad winding road with the green waste on each side, uniting it with the thickly-timbered hedgerows; the two pretty cottages at unequal distances, placed so as to mark the bends; the village beyond, with its mass of roofs and clustered chimneys peeping through the trees; and the rich distance, where cottages, mansions, churches, towns, seem embowered in some wide forest, and shut in by blue shadowy hills. Every day I admire this most beautiful landscape; yet never did it seem to me so fine or so glowing as now. All the tints of the glorious autumn, orange, tawny, yellow, red, are poured in profusion amongst the bright greens of the meadows and turnip fields, till the eye is satiated with colour; and then before us we have the common with its picturesque roughness of surface tufted with cottages, dappled with water, edging off on one side into fields, and farms, and orchards, and terminated on the other by the princely oak avenue. What a richness and variety the wild broken ground gives to the luxuriant cultivation of the rest of the landscape! Cowper has described it for me. How perpetually, as we walk in the country, his vivid pictures recur to the memory! Here is his common, and mine!

> "The common overgrown with fern, and rough
> With prickly gorse, that, shapeless and deform'd
> And dangerous to the touch, has yet its bloom,
> And decks itself with ornaments of gold;—
> ——————————————— there the turf
> Smells fresh, and, rich in odoriferous herbs
> And fungous fruits of earth, regales the sense
> With luxury of unexpected sweets."

The description is exact. There, too, to the left is my cricket-ground; (Cowper's common wanted that finishing grace;) and there stands one solitary urchin, as if in contemplation of its past and future glories; for, alas! cricket is over for the season. Ah! it is Ben Kirby, next brother to Joe, king of the youngsters, and probably his successor—for this

Michaelmas has cost us Joe! He is promoted from the farm to the mansion-house, two miles off: there he cleans shoes, rubs knives, and runs on errands, and is, as his mother expresses it, "a sort of 'prentice to the footman." I should not wonder if Joe, some day or other, should overtop the footman, and rise to be butler; and his splendid prospects must be our consolation for the loss of this great favourite. In the meantime we have Ben.

Ben Kirby is a year younger than Joe, and a school-fellow and rival of Jem Eusden. To be sure his abilities lie in rather a different line: Jem is a scholar, Ben is a wag: Jem is great in figures and writing, Ben in faces and mischief. His master says of him, that, if there were two such in the school, he must resign his office; and, as far as my observation goes, the worthy pedagogue is right. Ben is, it must be confessed,

a great corrupter of gravity. He hath an exceeding aversion to authority and decorum, and a wonderful boldness and dexterity in overthrowing the one and puzzling the other. His contortions of visage are astounding. His "power over his own muscles and those of other people" is almost equal to that of Liston; and indeed the original face, flat and square, and Chinese in its shape, of a fine tan complexion, with a snub nose, and a slit for a mouth, is nearly as comical as that matchless performer's. When aided by Ben's singular mobility of feature, his knowing winks, and grins, and shrugs, and nods, together with a certain dry shrewdness, a habit of saying sharp things, and a marvellous gift of impudence, it forms as fine a specimen as possible of a humorous country boy, an oddity in embryo. Everybody likes Ben, except his butts; (which may perhaps comprise half his acquaintance;) and of them no one so thoroughly hates and dreads him as our parish schoolmaster, a most worthy King Log, whom Ben dumbfounds twenty times a day. He is a great ornament of the cricket-ground, has a real genius for the game, and displays it after a very original manner, under the disguise of awkwardness—as the clown shows off his agility in a pantomime. Nothing comes amiss to him. By the bye, he would have been the very lad for us in our present dilemma; not a horse in England could master Ben Kirby. But we are too far from him now—and perhaps it is as well that we are so. I believe the rogue has a kindness for me, in remembrance of certain apples and nuts, which my usual companion, who delights in his wit, is accustomed to dole out to him. But it is a Robin Goodfellow nevertheless, a perfect Puck, that loves nothing on earth so well as mischief. Perhaps the horse may be the safer conductor of the two.

The avenue is quite alive to-day. Old women are picking up twigs and acorns, and pigs of all sizes doing their utmost to spare them the latter part of the trouble; boys and girls groping for beech-nuts under yonder clump; and a group of younger elves collecting as many dead

leaves as they can find to feed the bonfire which is smoking away so briskly amongst the trees,—a sort of rehearsal of the grand bonfire nine days hence; of the loyal conflagration of the arch traitor Guy Vaux, which is annually solemnised in the avenue, accompanied with as much of squibbery and crackery as our boys can beg or borrow—not to say steal. Ben Kirby is a great man on the 5th of November. All the savings of a month, the hoarded half-pence, the new farthings, the very luck-penny, go off *in fumo* on that night. For my part, I like this day-light mockery better. There is no gunpowder—odious gunpowder! no noise but the merry shouts of the small fry, so shrill and happy, and the cawing of the rooks, who are wheeling in large circles overhead, and wondering what is going forward in their territory—seeming in their

loud clamour to ask what that light smoke may mean that curls so prettily amongst their old oaks, towering as if to meet the clouds. There is something very intelligent in the ways of that black people the rooks, particularly in their wonder. I suppose it results from their numbers and their unity of purpose, a sort of collective and corporate wisdom. Yet geese congregate also; and geese never by any chance look wise. But then geese are a domestic fowl; we have spoiled them; and rooks are free commoners of nature, who use the habitations we provide for them, tenant our groves and our avenues, and never dream of becoming our subjects.

What a labyrinth of a road this is! I do think there are four turnings in the short half-mile between the avenue and the mill. And what a pity, as my companion observes—not that our good and jolly miller, the very representative of the old English yeomanry, should be so rich, but that one consequence of his riches should be the pulling down of the prettiest old mill that ever looked at itself in the Loddon, with the picturesque, low-browed, irregular cottage, which stood with its light-pointed roof, its clustered chimneys, and its ever-open door, looking like the real abode of comfort and hospitality, to build this huge, staring, frightful, red-brick mill, as ugly as a manufactory, and this great square house, ugly and red to match, just behind. The old buildings always

used to remind me of Wollett's beautiful engraving of a scene in the Maid of the Mill. It will be long before any artist will make a drawing of this. Only think of this redness in a picture! this boiled lobster of a house! Falstaff's description of Bardolph's nose would look pale in the comparison.

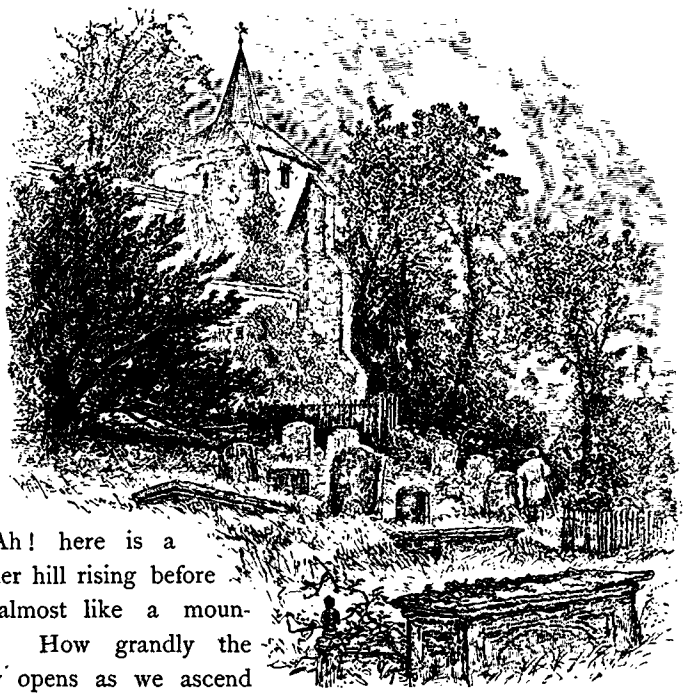
Here is that monstrous machine of a tilted waggon, with its load of flour, and its four fat horses. I wonder whether our horse will have the decency to get out of the way. If he does not, I am sure we cannot make him; and that enormous ship upon wheels, that ark on dry land, would roll over us like the car of Juggernaut. Really — Oh no! there is no danger now. I should have remembered that it is my friend Samuel Long who drives the mill-team. He will take care of us. "Thank you, Samuel!" And Samuel has put us on our way, steered us safely past his waggon, escorted us over the bridge; and now, having seen us through our immediate difficulties, has parted from us with a very civil bow and good-humoured smile, as one who is always civil and good-humoured, but with a certain triumphant masterful look in his eyes, which I have noted in men, even the best of them, when a woman gets into straits by attempting manly employments. He has done us great good though, and may be allowed his little feeling of superiority. The parting salute he bestowed on our steed, in the shape of an astounding crack of his huge whip, has put that refractory animal on his mettle. On we go fast! past the glazier's pretty house, with its porch and its filberd walk; along the narrow lane bordered with elms, whose fallen leaves have made the road one yellow; past that little farm-house with the horse-chesnut trees before, glowing like oranges; past the whitewashed school on the other side, gay with October roses; past the park, and the lodge, and the mansion, where once dwelt the great earl of Clarendon;—and now the rascal has begun to discover that Samuel Long and his whip are a mile

off, and that his mistress is driving him, and he slackens his pace accordingly. Perhaps he feels the beauty of the road just here, and goes slowly to enjoy it. Very beautiful it certainly is. The park paling forms the boundary on one side, with fine clumps of oak, and deer in all attitudes; the water, tufted with alders, flowing along

on the other. Another turn, and the water winds away, succeeded by a low hedge, and a sweep of green meadows; whilst the park and its palings are replaced by a steep bank, on which stands a small, quiet, village ale-house; and higher up, embosomed in wood, is the little country church, with its sloping churchyard and its low white steeple, peeping out from amongst magnificent yew-trees:—

> "Huge trunks! and each particular trunk a growth
> Of intertwisted fibres serpentine
> Up-coiling, and invet'rately convolved."
>
> WORDSWORTH.

No village church was ever more happily placed. It is the very image of the peace and humbleness inculcated within its walls.



Ah! here is a higher hill rising before us, almost like a mountain. How grandly the view opens as we ascend over that wild bank, overgrown with fern, and heath, and gorse, and between those tall hollies, glowing with their coral berries! What an expanse! But we have little time to gaze at present; for that piece of perversity, our horse, who has walked over so much level ground, has now, inspired, I presume, by a desire to revisit his stable, taken it into that unaccountable noddle of his to trot up this, the very steepest hill in the county. Here we are on the top; and in five minutes we have reached the lawn gate, and are in the very midst of that beautiful piece of art or nature, (I do not know to which class it belongs,) the pleasure-ground of F. Hill.

Never was the "prophetic eye of taste" exerted with more magical skill than in these plantations. Thirty years ago this place had no existence; it was a mere undistinguished tract of field and meadow and common land; now it is a mimic forest, delighting the eye with the finest combinations of trees and shrubs, the rarest effects of form and foliage, and bewildering the mind with its green glades, and impervious recesses, and apparently interminable extent. It is the triumph of landscape gardening, and never more beautiful than in this autumn sunset, lighting up the ruddy beech and the spotted sycamore, and gilding the shining fir-cones that hang so thickly amongst the dark pines. The robins are singing around us, as if they too felt the magic of the hour. How gracefully the roads winds through the leafy labyrinth, leading imperceptibly to the more ornamented sweep. Here we are at the door amidst geraniums, and carnations, and jasmines, still in flower. Ah! here is a flower sweeter than all, a bird gayer than the robin, the little bird that chirps to the tune of "mamma! mamma!" the bright-faced fairy, whose tiny feet come pattering along, making a merry music, mamma's own Frances! And following her guidance, here we are in the dear round room time enough to catch the last rays of the sun, as they light the noble landscape which lies like a panorama around us, lingering longest on that long island of old thorns and stunted oaks, the oasis of B. Heath, and then vanishing in a succession of gorgeous clouds.

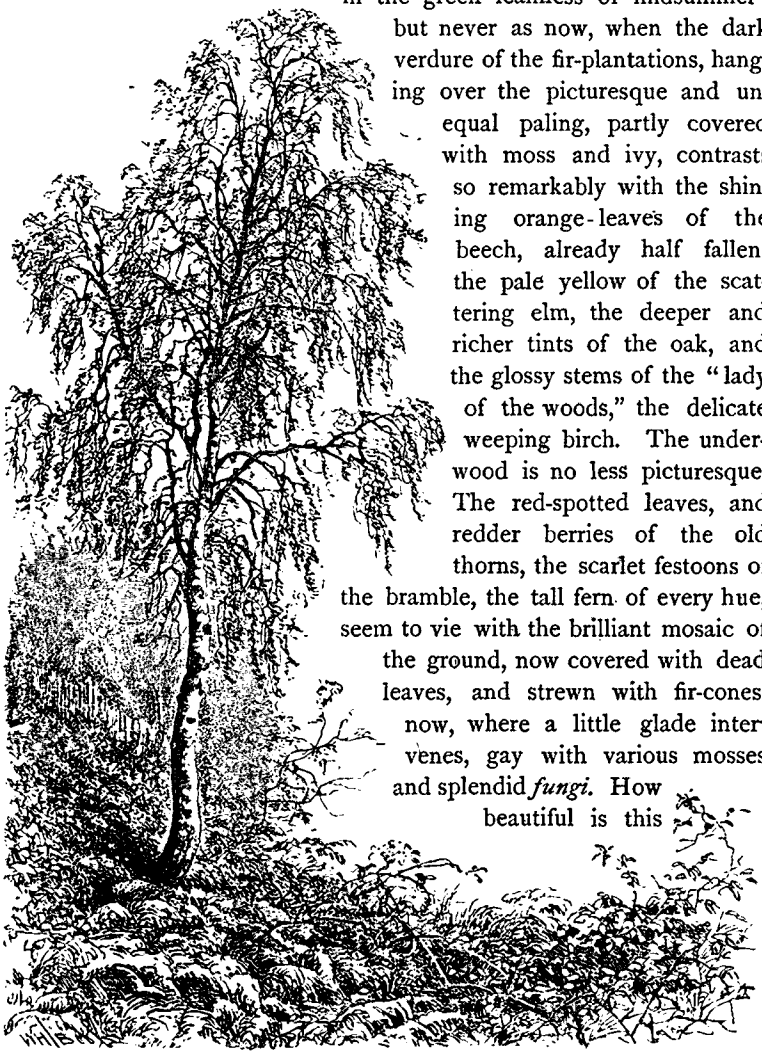
October 28th.—Another soft and brilliant morning. But the pleasures

of to-day must be written in short-hand. I have left myself no room for notes of admiration.

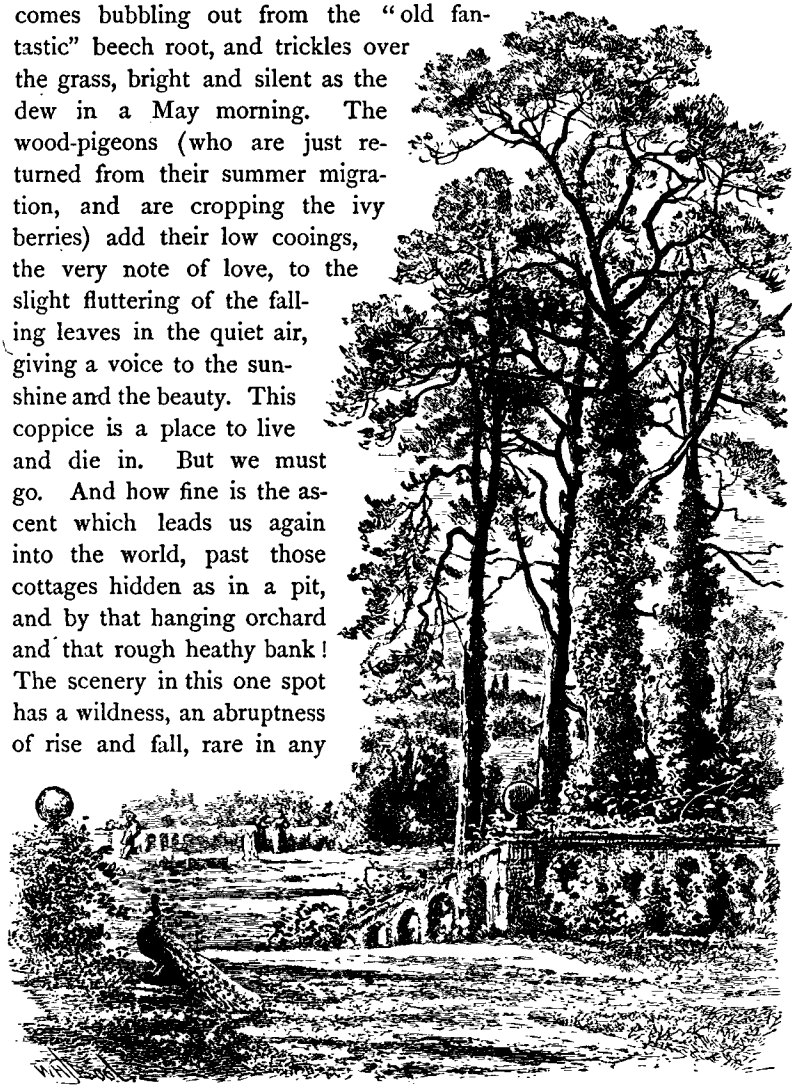
First we drove about the coppice; an extensive wood of oak, and elm, and beech, chiefly the former, which adjoins the park paling of F. Hill, of which demesne, indeed, it forms one of the most delightful parts. The roads through the coppice are studiously wild, so that they have the appearance of mere cart-tracks: and the manner in which the

ground is tumbled about, the steep declivities, the sunny slopes, the sudden swells and falls, now a close narrow valley, then a sharp ascent to an eminence commanding an immense extent of prospect, have a striking air of natural beauty, developed and heightened by the perfection of art. All this, indeed, was familiar to me; the colouring only was new. I had been there in early spring, when the fragrant palms were on the willow, and the yellow tassels on the hazel, and every twig

was swelling with renewed life; and I had been there again and again in the green leafiness of midsummer; but never as now, when the dark verdure of the fir-plantations, hanging over the picturesque and unequal paling, partly covered with moss and ivy, contrasts so remarkably with the shining orange-leaves of the beech, already half fallen, the pale yellow of the scattering elm, the deeper and richer tints of the oak, and the glossy stems of the "lady of the woods," the delicate weeping birch. The underwood is no less picturesque. The red-spotted leaves, and redder berries of the old thorns, the scarlet festoons of the bramble, the tall fern of every hue, seem to vie with the brilliant mosaic of the ground, now covered with dead leaves, and strewn with fir-cones, now, where a little glade intervenes, gay with various mosses and splendid *fungi*. How beautiful is this



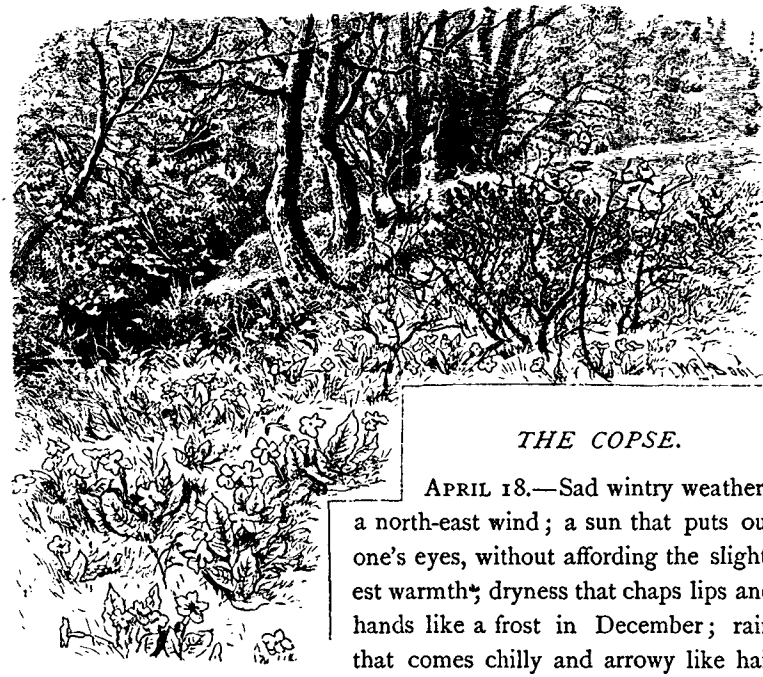
coppice to-day! especially where the little spring, as clear as crystal, comes bubbling out from the "old fantastic" beech root, and trickles over the grass, bright and silent as the dew in a May morning. The wood-pigeons (who are just returned from their summer migration, and are cropping the ivy berries) add their low cooings, the very note of love, to the slight fluttering of the falling leaves in the quiet air, giving a voice to the sunshine and the beauty. This coppice is a place to live and die in. But we must go. And how fine is the ascent which leads us again into the world, past those cottages hidden as in a pit, and by that hanging orchard and that rough heathy bank! The scenery in this one spot has a wildness, an abruptness of rise and fall, rare in any



part of England, rare above all in this rich and lovely but monotonous county. It is Switzerland in miniature.

And now we cross the hill to pay a morning visit to the family at the great house,—another fine place, commanding another fine sweep of country. The park, studded with old trees, and sinking gently into a valley, rich in wood and water, is in the best style of ornamental landscape, though more according to the common routine of gentlemen's seats than the singularly original place which we have just left. There is, however, one distinctive beauty in the grounds of the great house;—the magnificent firs which shade the terraces and surround the sweep, giving out in summer odours really Sabæan, and now in this low autumn sun producing an effect almost magical, as the huge red trunks, garlanded with ivy, stand out from the deep shadows like an army of giants. Indoors—Oh I must not take my readers indoors, or we shall never get away!—Indoors the sunshine is brighter still; for there, in a lofty, lightsome room, sits a damsel fair and arch and *piquante*, one whom Titian or Velasquez should be born again to paint, leaning over an instrument as sparkling and fanciful as herself, singing pretty French romances, and Scottish Jacobite songs, and all sorts of graceful and airy drolleries picked up I know not where—an English improvisatrice! A gayer Annot Lyle! whilst her sister, of a higher order of beauty, and with an earnest kindness in her smile that deepens its power, lends to the piano, as her father to the violin, an expression, a sensibility, a spirit, an eloquence, almost human—almost divine! Oh to hear these two instruments accompanying my dear companion (I forgot to say that she is a singer worthy to be so accompanied) in Haydn's exquisite canzonet, "She never told her love,"—to hear her voice, with all its power, its sweetness, its gush of sound, so sustained and assisted by modulations that rivalled its intensity of expression; to hear at once such poetry, such music, such execution, is a pleasure never to be forgotten, or mixed with meaner things. I seem to hear it still.

As in the bursting spring time o'er the eye
  Of one who haunts the fields fair visions creep
  Beneath the closed lids (afore dull sleep
Dims the quick fancy) of sweet flowers that lie
On grassy banks, oxlip of orient dye,
  And palest primrose and blue violet,
  All in their fresh and dewy beauty set,
Pictured within the sense, and will not fly:
So in mine ear resounds and lives again
  One mingled melody,—a voice, a pair
  Of instruments most voice-like! Of the air
Rather than of the earth seems that high strain,
A spirit's song, and worthy of the train
  That soothed old Prospero with music rare.



THE COPSE.

APRIL 18.—Sad wintry weather; a north-east wind; a sun that puts out one's eyes, without affording the slightest warmth; dryness that chaps lips and hands like a frost in December; rain that comes chilly and arrowy like hail in January; nature at a dead pause; no seeds up in the garden; no leaves out in the hedgerows; no cowslips swinging their pretty bells in the fields; no nightingales in the dingles; no swallows skimming round the great pond; no cuckoos (that ever I should miss that rascally sonneteer!) in any part. Nevertheless there is something of a charm in this wintry spring, this putting-back of the seasons. If the flower-clock must stand still for a month or two, could it choose a better time than that of the primroses and violets? I never remember (and for such gauds my memory, if not very good for aught of wise or useful, may be trusted) such an affluence of the one or such a duration of the other. Primrosy is the epithet which this year will retain in my recollection.

Hedge, ditch, meadow, field, even the very paths and highways, are set with them; but their chief *habitat* is a certain copse, about a mile off, where they are spread like a carpet, and where I go to visit them rather oftener than quite comports with the diginity of a lady of mature age. I am going thither this very afternoon, and May and her company are going too.

This Mayflower of mine is a strange animal. Instinct and imitation make in her an approach to reason which is sometimes almost startling. She mimics all that she sees us do, with the dexterity of a monkey, and far more of gravity and apparent purpose; cracks nuts and eats them; gathers currants and severs them from the stalk with the most delicate nicety; filches and munches apples and pears; is as dangerous in an orchard as a schoolboy; smells to flowers; smiles at meeting; answers in a pretty lively voice when spoken to (sad pity that the language should be unknown!) and has greatly the advantage of us in a conversation, inasmuch as our meaning is certainly clear to her;—all this and a thousand amusing prettinesses, (to say nothing of her canine feat of bringing her game straight to her master's feet, and refusing to resign it to any hand but his,) does my beautiful greyhound perform untaught, by the mere effect of imitation and sagacity. Well, May, at the end of the coursing season, having lost Brush, our old spaniel, her great friend, and the blue greyhound, Mariette, her comrade and rival, both of which four-footed worthies were sent out to keep for the summer, began to find solitude a weary condition, and to look abroad for company. Now it so happened that the same suspension of sport which had reduced our little establishment from three dogs to one, had also dispersed the splendid kennel of a celebrated courser in our neighbourhood, three of whose finest young dogs came home to "their walk" (as the sporting phrase goes) at the collarmaker's in our village. May, accordingly, on the first morning of her solitude, (she had never taken the slightest notice of her neighbours before, although they had

sojourned in our street upwards of a fortnight,) bethought herself of the timely resource offered to her by the vicinity of these canine *beaux*, and went up boldly and knocked at their stable door, which was already very commodiously on the half-latch. The three dogs came out with much alertness and gallantry, and May, declining apparently to enter their territories, brought them off to her own. This manœuvre has been repeated every day, with one variation; of the three dogs, the first a brindle, the second a yellow, and the third a black, the two first

only are now admitted to walk or consort with her, and the last, poor fellow, for no fault that I can discover except May's caprice, is driven away not only by the fair lady, but even by his old companions—is, so to say, sent to Coventry. Of her two permitted followers, the yellow gentleman, Saladin by name, is decidedly the favourite. He is, indeed, May's shadow, and will walk with me whether I choose or not. It is quite impossible to get rid of him unless by discarding Miss May also;

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—and to accomplish a walk in the country without her, would be like an adventure of Don Quixote, without his faithful 'squire Sancho.

So forth we set, May and I, and Saladin, and the brindle; May and myself walking with the sedateness and decorum befitting our sex and age (she is five years old this grass, rising six)—the young things, for the soldan and the brindle are (not meaning any disrespect) little better than puppies, frisking and frolicking as best pleased them.

Our route lay for the first part along the sheltered quiet lanes which lead to our old habitation; a way never trodden by me without peculiar and home-like feelings, full of the recollections, the pains and pleasures, of other days. But we are not to talk sentiment now;—even May would not understand that maudlin language. We must get on. What a wintry hedge-row this is for the eighteenth of April! Primrosy to be sure, abundantly spangled with those stars of the earth,—but so bare, so

leafless, so cold! The wind whistles through the brown boughs as in winter. Even the early elder shoots, which do make an approach to springiness, look brown, and the small leaves of the woodbine, which have also ventured to peep forth, are of a sad purple, frost-bitten, like a dairymaid's elbows on a snowy morning. The very birds, in this season of pairing and building, look chilly and uncomfortable, and their nests! ——"Oh, Saladin! come away from the hedge! Don't you see that what puzzles you and makes you leap up in the air is a redbreast's nest? Don't you see the pretty speckled eggs? Don't you hear the poor hen calling as it were for help? Come here this moment, sir!" And by good luck Saladin (who for a paynim has tolerable qualities) comes, before he has touched the nest, or before his playmate the brindle, the less manageable of the two, has espied it.

Now we go round the corner and cross the bridge, where the common, with its clear stream winding between clumps of elms, assumes so park-like an appearance. Who is this approaching so slowly and majestically, this square bundle of petticoat and cloak, this road-waggon of a woman? It is, it must be Mrs. Sally Mearing, the completest specimen within my knowledge of farmeresses (may I be allowed that innovation in language?) as they were. It can be nobody else.

Mrs. Sally Mearing, when I first became acquainted with her, occupied, together with her father, (a superannuated man of ninety), a large farm very near our former habitation. It had been anciently a great manor-farm or court-house, and was still a stately, substantial building, whose lofty halls and spacious chambers gave an air of grandeur to the

common offices to which they were applied. Traces of gilding might yet be seen on the panels which covered the walls, and on the huge carved chimney-pieces which rose almost to the ceilings; and the marble tables and the inlaid oak staircase still spoke of the former grandeur of the court. Mrs. Sally corresponded well with the date of her mansion, although she troubled herself little with its dignity. She was thoroughly of the old school, and had a most comfortable contempt for the new; rose at four in winter and summer, breakfasted at six, dined at eleven in the forenoon, supped at five, and was regularly in bed before eight, except when the hay-time or the harvest imperiously required her to sit up till sunset,—a necessity to which she submitted with no very good grace. To a deviation from these hours, and to the modern iniquities of white aprons, cotton stockings, and muslin handkerchiefs, (Mrs. Sally herself always wore check, black worsted, and a sort of yellow compound which she was wont to call *susy*,) together with the invention of drill plough and thrashing machines, and other agricultural novelties, she failed not to attribute all the mishaps or misdoings of the whole parish. The last mentioned discovery especially aroused her indignation. Oh to hear her descant on the merits of the flail, wielded by a stout right arm, such as she had known in her youth, (for by her account there was as great a deterioration in bones and sinews as in the other implements of husbandry,) was enough to make the very inventor break his machine. She would even take up her favourite instrument, and thrash the air herself by way of illustrating her argument, and, to say truth, few men in these degenerate days could have matched the stout, brawny, muscular limb which Mrs. Sally displayed at sixty-five.

In spite of this contumacious rejection of agricultural improvements, the world went well with her at Court-Farm. A good landlord, an easy rent, incessant labour, unremitting frugality, and excellent times, insured a regular though moderate profit: and she lived on, grumbling and prospering, flourishing and complaining, till two misfortunes befell her

at once—her father died, and her lease expired. The loss of her father, although a bedridden man, turned of ninety, who could not in the course of nature have been expected to live long, was a terrible shock to a daughter, who was not so much younger as to be without fears for her own life, and who had besides been so used to nursing the good old man, and looking to his little comforts, that she missed him as a mother would miss an ailing child. The expiration of the lease was a grievance and a puzzle of a different nature. Her landlord would have willingly retained his excellent tenant, but not on the terms on which she then held the land, which had not varied for fifty years: so that poor Mrs. Sally had the misfortune to find rent rising and prices sinking both at the same moment—a terrible solecism in political economy. Even this, however, I believe she would have endured, rather than have quitted the house where she was born, and to which all her ways and notions were adapted, had not a priggish steward, as much addicted to improvement and reform as she was to precedent and established usages, insisted on binding her by lease to spread a certain number of loads of chalk on every field. This tremendous innovation, for never had that novelty in manure whitened the crofts and pightles of Court-Farm, decided her at once. She threw the proposals into the fire, and left the place in a week.

Her choice of a habitation occasioned some wonder, and much amusement in our village world. To be sure, upon the verge of seventy, an old maid may be permitted to dispense with the more rigid punctilio of her class, but Mrs. Sally had always been so tenacious on the score of character, so very a prude, so determined an avoider of the "men folk," (as she was wont contemptuously to call them,) that we all were conscious of something like astonishment, on finding that she and her little handmaid had taken up their abode in one end of a spacious farm-house belonging to the bluff old bachelor, George Robinson, of the Lea. Now farmer Robinson was quite as notorious for his aversion to

petticoated things, as Mrs. Sally for her hatred to the unfeathered bipeds who wear doublet and hose, so that there was a little astonishment in that quarter too, and plenty of jests, which the honest farmer speedily silenced, by telling all who joked on the subject that he had given his lodger fair warning, that, let people say what they would, he was quite determined not to marry her; so that if she had any views that way, it would be better for her to go elsewhere. This declaration, which must

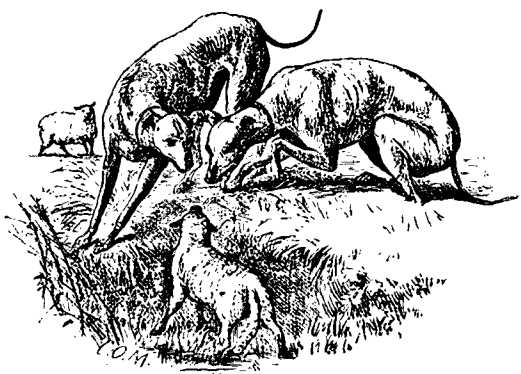
be admitted to have been more remarkable for frankness than civility, made, however, no ill impression on Mrs. Sally. To the farmer's she went, and at his house she lives still, with her little maid, her tabby cat, a decrepit sheep-dog, and much of the lumber of Court-Farm, which she could not find in her heart to part from. There she follows her old ways and her old hours, untempted by matrimony, and unassailed (as far as I hear) by love or by scandal, with no other grievance than an

occasional dearth of employment for herself and her young lass, (even pewter dishes do not always want scouring,) and now and then a twinge of the rheumatism.

Here she is, that good relique of the olden time—for, in spite of her whims and prejudices, a better and a kinder woman never lived—here she is, with the hood of her red cloak pulled over her close black bonnet, of that silk which once (it may be presumed) was fashionable, since it is still called mode, and her whole stout figure huddled up in a miscellaneous and most substantial covering of thick petticoats, gowns, aprons, shawls, and cloaks,—a weight which it requires the strength of a thrasher to walk under,—here she is, with her square honest visage, and her loud frank voice;—and we hold a pleasant disjointed chat of rheumatisms and early chickens, bad weather, and hats with feathers in them;—the last exceedingly sore subject being introduced by poor Jane Davis, (a cousin of Mrs. Sally,) who, passing us in a beaver bonnet, on her road from school, stopped to drop her little curtsy, and was soundly scolded for her civility. Jane, who is a gentle, humble, smiling lass, about twelve years old, receives so many rebukes from her worthy relative, and bears them so meekly, that I should not wonder if they were to be followed by a legacy: I sincerely wish they may. Well, at last we said good bye; when, on inquiring my destination, and hearing that I was bent to the ten-acre copse, (part of the farm which she ruled so long,) she stopped me to tell a dismal story of two sheep-stealers, who, sixty years ago, were found hidden in that copse, and only taken after great difficulty and resistance, and the maiming of a peace officer.—"Pray

don't go there, Miss! For mercy's sake don't be so venturesome! Think if they should kill you!" were the last words of Mrs. Sally.

Many thanks for her care and kindness! But, without being at all fool-hardy in general, I have no great fear of the sheep-stealers of sixty years ago. Even if they escaped hanging for that exploit, I should greatly doubt there being in case to attempt another. So on we go: down the short shady lane, and out on the pretty retired green, shut in by fields and hedge-rows, which we must cross to reach the copse. How lively this green nook is to-day, half covered with cows, and horses, and sheep! And how glad these frolicsome greyhounds are to exchange the hard gravel of the high road for this pleasant short turf, which seems made for their gambols! How beautifully they are at play,



chasing each other round and round in lessening circles, darting off at all kinds of angles, crossing and recrossing May, and trying to win her sedateness into a game at romps, turning round on each other with gay defiance, pursuing the cows and the colts, leaping up as if to catch the crows in their flight;—all in their harmless and innocent——"Ah wretches! villains! rascals! four-footed mischiefs! canine plagues!

Saladin! Brindle!"—They are after the sheep—"Saladin, I say!"—They have actually singled out that pretty spotted lamb—"Brutes, if I catch you! Saladin! Brindle!" We shall be taken up for sheep-stealing presently ourselves. They have chased the poor little lamb into a ditch, and are mounting guard over it, standing at bay.—"Ah wretches, I have you now! for shame, Saladin! Get away, Brindle! See how good May is. Off with you, brutes! For shame! For shame!" and brandishing a handkerchief, which could hardly be an efficient instrument of correction, I succeeded in driving away the two puppies, who after all meant nothing more than play, although it was somewhat rough, and rather too much in the style of the old fable of the boys and the frogs. May is gone after them, perhaps to scold them: for she has been as grave as a judge during the whole proceeding, keeping ostentatiously close to me, and taking no part whatever in the mischief.

The poor little pretty lamb! here it lies on the bank quite motionless, frightened I believe to death, for certainly those villains never touched it. It does not stir. Does it breathe? Oh yes, it does! It is alive, safe enough. Look, it opens its eyes, and, finding the coast clear and its enemies far away, it springs up in a moment and gallops to its dam, who has stood bleating the whole time at a most respectful distance. Who would suspect a lamb of so much simple cunning? I really thought the pretty thing was dead—and now how glad the ewe is to recover her curling spotted little one! How fluttered they look! Well! this adventure has flurried me too; between fright and running, I warrant you my heart beats as fast as the lamb's.

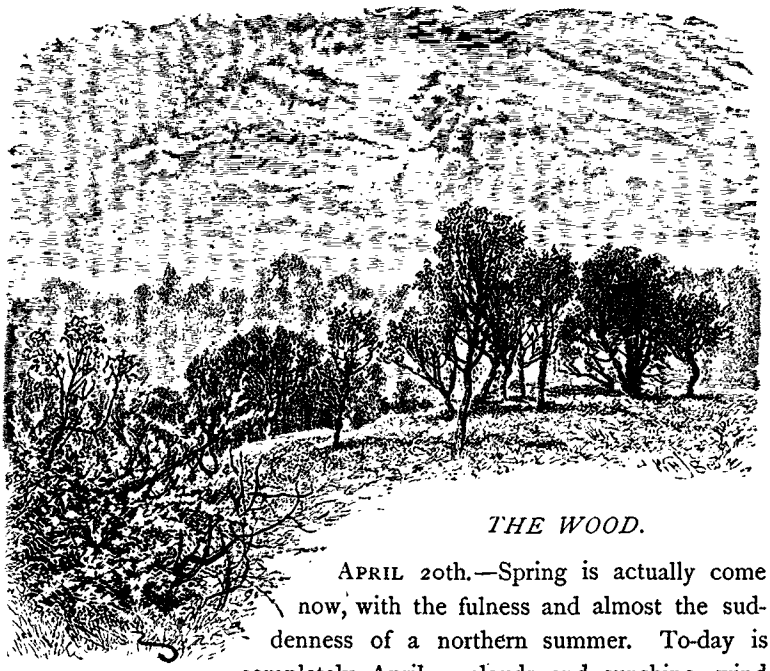
Ah! here is the shameless villain Saladin, the cause of the commotion, thrusting his slender nose into my hand to beg pardon and make up!" "Oh wickedest of soldans! Most iniquitous pagan! Soul of a Turk!"—but there is no resisting the good-humoured creature's penitence. I must pat him. "There! there! Now we will go to the copse, I am sure we shall find no worse malefactors than ourselves—

shall we, May?—and the sooner we get out of sight of the sheep the better; for Brindle seems meditating another attack. *Allons, messieurs*, over this gate, across this meadow, and here is the copse."

How boldly that superb ash-tree with its fine silver bark rises from the bank, and what a fine entrance it makes with the holly beside it, which also deserves to be called a tree! But here we are in the copse. Ah! only one half of the underwood was cut last year, and the other is at its full growth: hazel, briar, woodbine, bramble, forming one impenetrable thicket, and almost uniting with the lower branches of the elms, and oaks, and beeches, which rise at regular distances overhead. No foot can penetrate that dense and thorny entanglement; but there is a walk all round by the side of the wide sloping bank, walk and bank and copse carpeted with primroses, whose fresh and balmy odour impregnates the very air. Oh how exquisitely beautiful! and it is not the primroses only, those gems of flowers, but the natural mosaic of which they form a part: that net-work of ground-ivy, with its lilac blossoms and the subdued tint of its purplish leaves, those rich mosses, those enamelled wild hyacinths, those spotted arums, and above all those wreaths of ivy linking all those flowers together with chains of leaves more beautiful than blossoms, whose white veins seem swelling amidst the deep green or splendid brown;—it is the whole earth that is so beautiful! Never surely were primroses so richly set, and never did primroses better deserve such a setting. There they are of their own lovely yellow, the hue to which

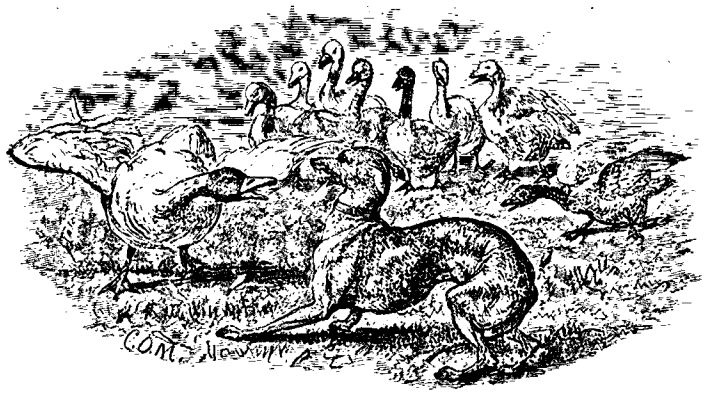
they have given a name, the exact tint of the butterfly that overhangs them (the first I have seen this year! can spring really be coming at last?)—sprinkled here and there with tufts of a reddish purple, and others of the purest white, as some accident of soil affects that strange and inscrutable operation of nature, the colouring of flowers. Oh how fragrant they are, and how pleasant it is to sit in this sheltered copse, listening to the fine creaking of the wind amongst the branches, the most unearthly of sounds, with this gay tapestry under our feet, and the wood-pigeons flitting from tree to tree, and mixing the deep note of love with the elemental music.

Yes! spring is coming. Wood-pigeons, butterflies, and sweet flowers, all give token of the sweetest of the seasons. Spring is coming. The hazel stalks are swelling and putting forth their pale tassels, the satin palms with their honeyed odours are out on the willow, and the last lingering winter berries are dropping from the hawthorn, and making way for the bright and blossomy leaves.



THE WOOD.

APRIL 20th.—Spring is actually come now, with the fulness and almost the suddenness of a northern summer. To-day is completely April;—clouds and sunshine, wind and showers; blossoms on the trees, grass in the fields, swallows by the ponds, snakes in the hedge-rows, nightingales in the thickets, and cuckoos every where. My young friend Ellen G. is going with me this evening to gather wood-sorrel. She never saw that most elegant plant, and is so delicate an artist that the introduction will be a mutual benefit; Ellen will gain a subject worthy of her pencil, and the pretty weed will live;—no small favour to a flower almost as transitory as the gum cistus: duration is the only charm which it wants, and that Ellen will give it. The weather is, to be sure, a little threatening, but we are not people to mind the weather when we have an object in view; we shall certainly go in quest of the wood-sorrel, and will take May, provided we can escape May's followers; for since the adventure of



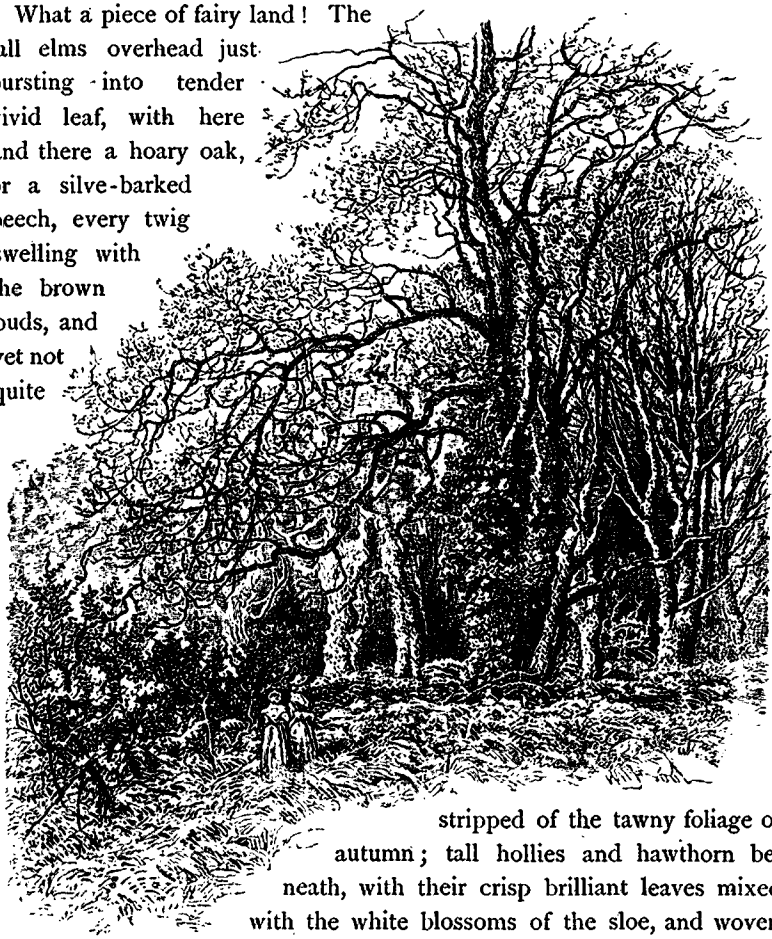
the lamb, Saladin has had an affair with a gander, furious in defence of his goslings, in which rencontre the gander came of conqueror; and as geese abound in the wood to which we are going, (called by the country people the Pinge,) and the victory may not always incline to the right side, I should be very sorry to lead the Soldan to fight his battles over again. We will take nobody but May.

So saying, we proceeded on our way through winding lanes, between hedge-rows tenderly green, till we reached the hatch-gate, with the white cottage beside it embosomed in fruit trees, which forms the entrance to the Pinge, and in a moment the whole scene was before our eyes.

"Is not this beautiful, Ellen?" The answer could hardly be other than a glowing rapid "Yes!"—A wood is generally a pretty place; but this wood—Imagine a smaller forest, full of glades and sheep-walks, surrounded by irregular cottages with their blooming orchards, a clear stream winding about the brakes, and a road intersecting it, and giving life and light to the picture; and you will have a faint idea of the Pinge. Every step was opening a new point of view, a fresh combination of glade and path and thicket. The accessories too were changing

every moment. Ducks, geese, pigs, and children, giving way, as we advanced into the wood, to sheep and forest ponies; and they again disappearing as we became more entangled in its mazes, till we heard nothing but the song of the nightingale, and saw only the silent flowers.

What a piece of fairy land! The tall elms overhead just bursting into tender vivid leaf, with here and there a hoary oak, or a silve-barked beech, every twig swelling with the brown buds, and yet not quite



stripped of the tawny foliage of autumn; tall hollies and hawthorn beneath, with their crisp brilliant leaves mixed with the white blossoms of the sloe, and woven

together with garlands of woodbines and wild-briers;—what a fairy land!

Primroses, cowslips, pansies, and the regular epen-eyed white blossom of the wood anemone, (or to use the more elegant Hampshire name, the windflower,) were set under out feet as thick as daisies in a meadow; but the pretty weed that we came to seek was coyer; and Ellen began to fear that we had mistaken the place or the season.—At last she had herself the pleasure of finding it under a brake of holly—

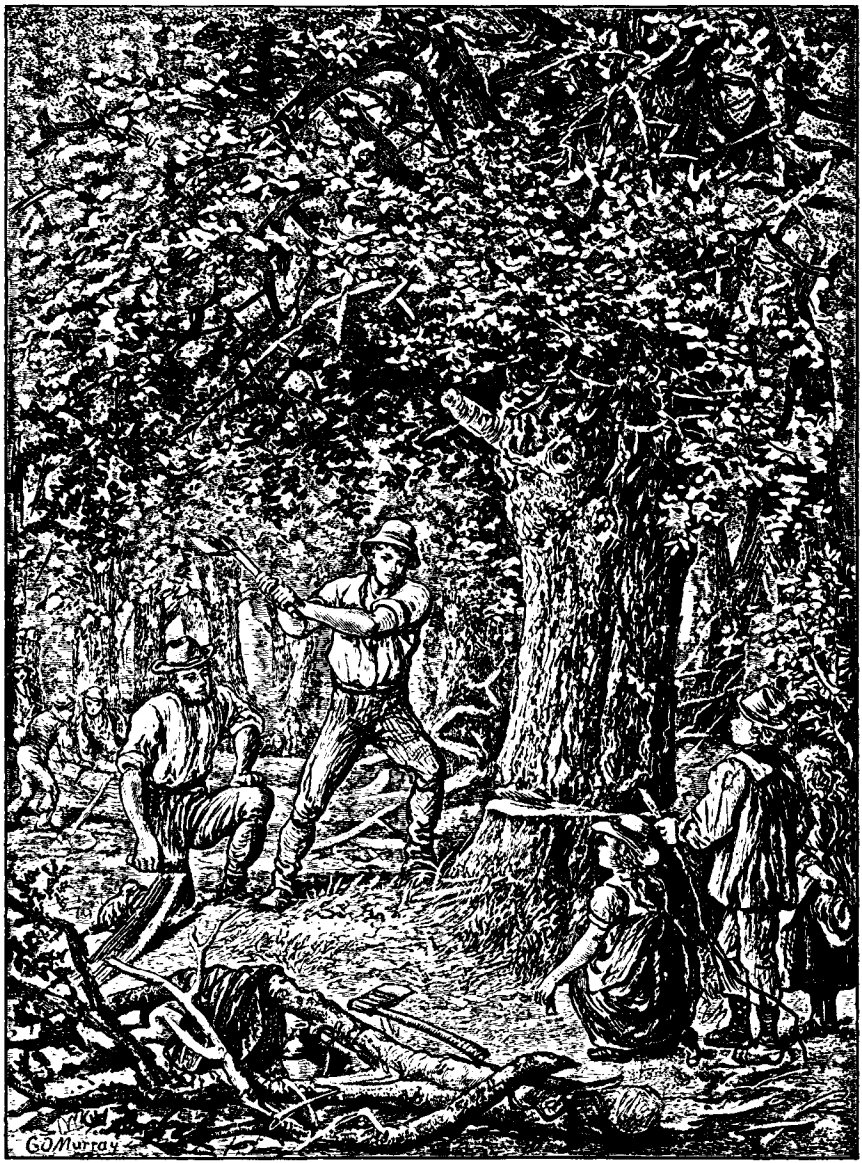
"Oh look! look! I am sure that this is the wood-sorrel! Look at the pendent white flower, shaped like a snow-drop and veined with purple streaks, and the beautiful trefoil leaves folded like a heart,—some, the young ones, so vividly yet tenderly green that the foliage of the elm and the hawthorn would show dully at their side,—others of a deeper tint, and lined, as it were, with a rich and changeful purple!—Don't

you see them?" pursued my dear young friend, who is a delightful piece of life and sunshine, and was half inclined to scold me for the calmness with which, amused by her enthusiasm, I stood listening to her ardent exclamations—"Don't you see them? Oh how beautiful! and in what quantity! what profusion! See how the dark shade of the holly sets off the light and delicate colouring of the flower!—And see that other bed of them springing from the rich moss in the roots of that old beech tree! Pray let us gather some. Here are baskets." So, quickly and carefully we began gathering, leaves, blossoms, roots and all, for the plant is so fragile that it will not brook separation;—quickly and carefully we gathered, encountering divers petty misfortunes in spite of all our care, now caught by the veil in a holly bush, now hitching our shawls in a bramble, still gathering on, in spite of scratched fingers, till we had nearly filled our baskets and began to talk of our departure:—

"But where is May? May! May! No going home without her. May! Here she comes galloping, the beauty!"—(Ellen is almost as fond of May as I am.)—"What has she got in her mouth? that rough, round, brown substance which she touches so tenderly? What can it be? A bird's nest? Naughty May!"

"No! as I live, a hedgehog! Look, Ellen, how it has coiled itself into a thorny ball! Off with it, May! Don't bring it to me!"—— And May, somewhat reluctant to part with her prickly prize, however troublesome of carriage, whose change of shape seemed to me to have puzzled her sagacity more than any event I ever witnessed, for in general she has perfectly the air of understanding all that is going forward—May at last dropt the hedgehog; continuing, however, to pat it with her delicate cat-like paw, cautiously and daintily applied,

and caught back suddenly and rapidly after every touch, as if her poor captive had been a red-hot coal. Finding that these pats entirely failed in solving the riddle, (for the hedgehog shammed dead, like the lamb the other day, and appeared entirely motionless,) she gave him so spirited a nudge with her pretty black nose, that she not only turned him over, but sent him rolling some little way along the turfy path,—an operation which that sagacious quadruped endured with the most perfect passiveness, the most admirable non-resistance. No wonder that May's discernment was at fault, I myself, if I had not been aware of the trick, should have said that the ugly rough thing which she was trundling along, like a bowl or a cricket-ball, was an inanimate substance, something devoid of sensation and of will. At last my poor pet, thoroughly perplexed and tired out, fairly relinquished the contest, and came slowly away, turning back once or twice to look at the object of her curiosity, as if half inclined to return and try the event of another shove. The sudden flight of a wood-pigeon effectually diverted her attention; and Ellen amused herself by fancying how the hedgehog was scuttling away, till our notice was also attracted by a very different object.

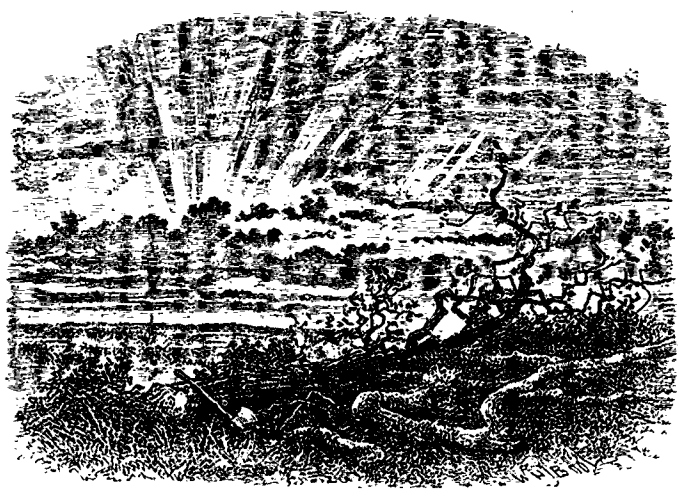


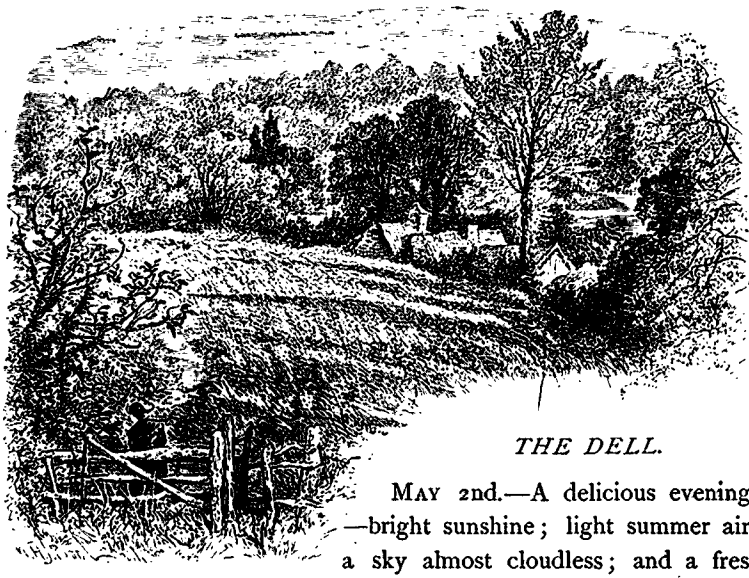
"AS HE GAVE THE FINAL STROKES ROUND THE ROOT."

We had nearly threaded the wood, and were approaching an open grove of magnificent oaks on the other side, when sounds other than of nightingales burst on our ear, the deep and frequent strokes of the woodman's axe, and emerging from the Pinge we discovered the havoc which that axe had committed. Above twenty of the finest trees lay stretched on the velvet turf. There they lay in every shape and form of devastation: some, bare trunks stripped ready for the timber carriage, with the bark built up in long piles at the side; some with the spoilers busy about them, stripping, hacking, hewing; others with their noble branches, their brown and fragrant shoots all fresh as if they were alive—majestic corses, the slain of to-day! The grove was like a field of battle. The young lads who were stripping the bark, the very children who were picking up the chips, seemed awed and silent, as if conscious that death was around them. The nightingales sang faintly and interruptedly—a few low frightened notes like a requiem.

Ah! here we are at the very scene of murder, the very tree that they are felling; they have just hewn round the trunk with those slaughtering axes, and are about to saw it asunder. After all, it is a fine and thrilling operation, as the work of death usually is. Into how grand an attitude was that young man thrown as he gave the final strokes round the root; and how wonderful is the effect of that supple and apparently powerless saw, bending like a riband, and yet overmastering that giant of the woods, conquering and overthrowing that thing of life! Now it has passed half through the trunk, and the woodman has begun to calculate which way the tree will fall; he drives a wedge to direct its course;—now a few more movements of the noiseless saw; and then a larger wedge. See how the branches tremble! Hark how the trunk begins to crack! Another stroke of the huge hammer on the wedge, and the tree quivers, as with a mortal agony, shakes, reels, and falls. How slow, and solemn, and awful it is! How like to death, to human death in its grandest form! Cæsar in the Capitol, Seneca in the bath, could not fall more sublimely than that oak.

Even the heavens seem to sympathize with the devastation. The clouds have gathered into one thick low canopy, dark and vapoury as the smoke which overhangs London; the setting sun is just gleaming underneath with a dim and bloody glare, and the crimson rays spreading upward with a lurid and portentous grandeur, a subdued and dusky glow, like the light reflected on the sky from some vast conflagration. The deep flush fades away, and the rain begins to descend; and we hurry homeward rapidly, yet sadly, forgetful alike of the flowers, the hedgehog, and the wetting, thinking and talking only of the fallen tree.





THE DELL.

MAY 2nd.—A delicious evening;—bright sunshine; light summer air; a sky almost cloudless; and a fresh yet delicate verdure on the hedges and in the fields;—an evening that seems made for a visit to my newly-discovered haunt, the mossy dell, one of the most beautiful spots in the neighbourhood, which after passing, times out of number, the field which it terminates, we found out about two months ago from the accident of May's killing a rabbit there. May has had a fancy for the place ever since; and so have I.

Thither accordingly we bend our way;—through the village;—up the hill;—along the common;—past the avenue;—across the bridge; and by the mill. How deserted the road is to-night! We have not seen a single acquaintance, except poor blind Robert, laden with his sack of grass plucked from the hedges, and the little boy that leads him. A singular division of labour! Little Jem guides Robert to the spots where the long grass grows, and tells him where it is most plentiful; and then the old man cuts it close to the roots, and between them they fill the sack, and sell the contents in the village. Half-the

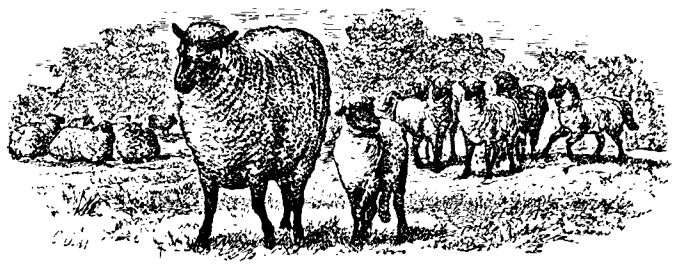
cows in the street—for our baker, our wheelwright, and our shoemaker has each his Alderney—owe the best part of their maintenance to blind Robert's industry.

Here we are at the entrance of the corn-field which leads to the dell, and which commands so fine a view of the Loddon, the mill, the great farm, with its picturesque outbuildings, and the range of woody hills beyond. It is impossible not to pause a moment at that gate, the landscape, always beautiful, is so suited to the season and the hour,—so bright, and gay, and spring-like. But May, who has the chance of another rabbit in her pretty head, has galloped forward to the dingle, and poor May, who follows me so faithfully in all my wanderings, has a right to a little indulgence in hers. So to the dingle we go.

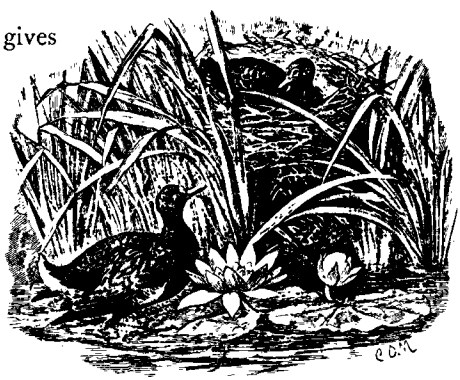
At the end of the field, which when seen from the road seems terminated by a thick dark coppice, we come suddenly to the edge of a ravine, on one side fringed with a low growth of alder, birch, and willow, on the other mossy, turfy, and bare, or only broken by bright

tufts of blossomed broom. One or two old pollards almost conceal the winding road that leads down the descent, by the side of which a spring as bright as crystal runs gurgling along. The dell itself is an irregular piece of broken ground, in some parts very deep, intersected by two or three high banks of equal irregularity, now abrupt and bare, and rock-like, now crowned with tufts of the feathery willow or magnificent old thorns. Everywhere the earth is covered by short fine turf, mixed with mosses, soft, beautiful, and various, and embossed with the speckled leaves and lilac flowers of the arum, the paler blossoms of the common orchis, the enamelled blue of the wild hyacinth, so splendid in this evening light, and large tufts of oxlips and cowslips, rising like nose-gays from the short turf.

The ground on the other side of the dell is much lower than the field through which we came, so that it is mainly to the labyrinthine intricacy of these high banks that it owes it singular character of wildness and variety. Now we seem hemmed in by those green cliffs, shut out from all the world, with nothing visible but those verdant mounds and the deep blue sky; now by some sudden turn we get a peep at an adjoining meadow, where the sheep are lying, dappling its sloping surface like the small clouds on the summer heaven. Poor harmless, quiet creatures, how still they are! Some socially lying side by side; some grouped in threes and fours; some quite apart. Ah! there are lambs amongst them—pretty, pretty lambs!—nestled in by their mothers. Soft, quiet, sleepy things! Not all so quiet, though! There is a party of these young lambs as wide awake as heart can desire; half a dozen of them playing together, frisking, dancing, leaping, butting, and crying in the young voice, which is so pretty a diminutive of the full-grown bleat. How beautiful they are with their innocent spotted faces, their mottled feet, their long curly tails, and their light flexible forms, frolicking like so many kittens, but with a gentleness, an assurance of sweetness and innocence, which no kitten, nothing that ever is to be a cat, can have.



How complete and perfect is their enjoyment of existence! Ah! little rogues! your play has been too noisy; you have awakened your mammas; and two or three of the old ewes are getting up; and one of them marching gravely to the troop of lambs has selected her own, given her a gentle butt, and trotted off; the poor rebuked lamb following meekly, but every now and then stopping and casting a longing look at its playmates; who, after a moment's awed pause, had resumed their gambols: whilst the stately dame every now and then looked back in her turn, to see that her little one was following. At last she lay down, and the lamb by her side. I never saw so pretty a pastoral scene in my life.



Another turning of the dell gives a glimpse of the dark coppice by which it is backed, and from which we are separated by some marshy, rushy ground, where the springs have formed into a pool, and where the moorhen loves to build her nest. Ay, there is one scudding away now;—I can hear her plash into the water, and the rustling of her wings amongst the rushes.

This is the deepest part of the wild dingle. How uneven the ground is! Surely these excavations, now so thoroughly clothed with vegetation, must originally have been huge gravel pits; there is no other way of accounting for the labyrinth, for they do dig gravel in such capricious meanders; but the quantity seems incredible. Well! there is no end of guessing! We are getting amongst the springs, and must turn back. Round this corner, where on ledges like fairy terraces the orchises and arums grow, and we emerge suddenly on a new side of the dell, just fronting the small homestead of our good neighbour farmer Allen.

This rustic dwelling belongs to what used to be called in this part of the country "a little bargain:" thirty or forty acres, perhaps, of arable land, which the owner and his sons cultivated themselves, whilst the wife and daughters assisted in the husbandry, and eked out the slender earnings by the produce of the dairy, the poultry yard, and the orchard; —an order of cultivators now passing rapidly away, but in which much of the best part of the English character, its industry, its frugality, its sound sense, and its kindness might be found. Farmer Allen himself is an excellent specimen, the cheerful, venerable old man with his long white hair, and his bright grey eye, and his wife is a still finer. They have had a hard struggle to win through the world and keep their little property undivided; but good management and good principles, and the assistance afforded them by an admirable son, who left our village a poor 'prentice boy, and is now a partner in a great house in London, have enabled them to overcome all the difficulties of these trying times, and they are now enjoying the peaceful evenings of a well-spent life as free from care and anxiety as their best friends could desire.

Ah! there is Mr. Allen in the orchard, the beautiful orchard, with its glorious garlands of pink and white, its pearly pear-blossoms and coral apple-buds. What a flush of bloom it is! How brightly delicate it appears, thrown into strong relief by the dark house and the weather-

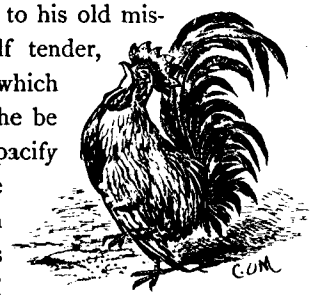
stained barn, in this soft evening light! The very grass is strewed with the snowy petals of the pear and the cherry. And there sits Mrs. Allen, feeding her poultry, with her three little grand-daughters from London, pretty fairies from three years old to five (only two and twenty months elapsed between the birth of the eldest and the youngest) playing round her feet.

Mrs. Allen, my dear Mrs. Allen, has been that rare thing a beauty, and although she be now an old woman I had almost said that she is so still. Why should I not say so? Nobleness of feature and sweetness of expression are surely as delightful in age as in youth. Her face and figure are much like those which are stamped indelibly on the memory of every one who ever saw that grand specimen of woman—Mrs. Siddons. The outline of Mrs. Allen's face is exactly the same; but there is more softness, more gentleness, a more feminine composure in the eye and in the smile. Mrs. Allen never played Lady Macbeth. Her hair, almost as black as at twenty, is parted on her large fair forehead, and combed under her exquisitely neat and snowy cap; a muslin neck-kerchief, a grey stuff gown, and a white apron complete the picture.

There she sits under an old elder tree which flings its branches over her like a canopy, whilst the setting sun illumines her venerable figure and touches the leaves with an emerald light; there she sits, placid and smiling, with her spectacles in her hand and a measure of barley on her lap, into which the little girls are dipping their chubby hands

"THERE SHE SITS, PLACID AND SMILING, WITH HER SPECTACLES IN HER HAND AND A MEASURE OF BARLEY ON HER LAP."

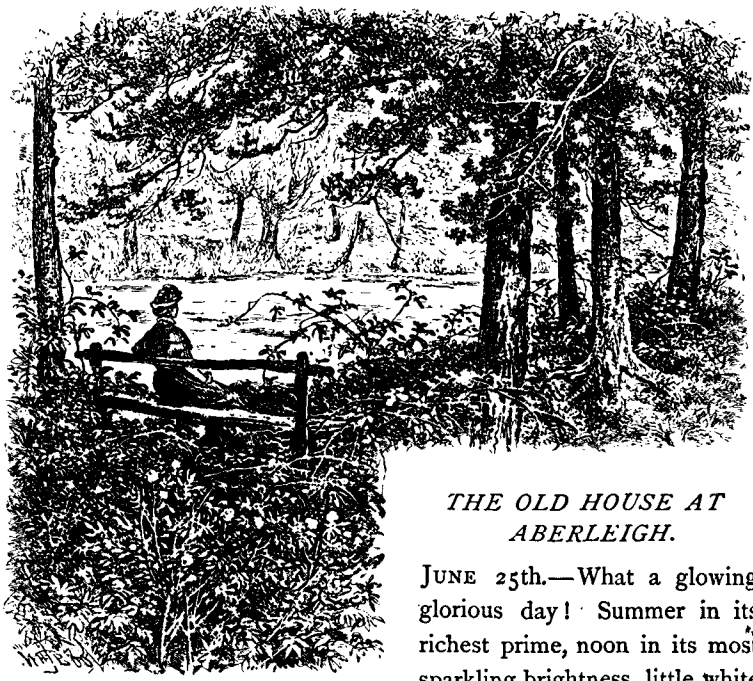
and scattering the corn amongst the ducks and chickens with unspeakable glee. But those ingrates the poultry don't seem so pleased and thankful as they ought to be; they mistrust their young feeders. All domestic animals dislike children, partly from an instinctive fear of their tricks and their thoughtlessness; partly, I suspect, from jealousy. Jealousy seems a strange tragic passion to attribute to the inmates of the basse cour,—but only look at that strutting fellow of a bantam cock, (evidently a favourite,) who sidles up to his old mistress with an air half affronted, and half tender, turning so scornfully from the barley-corns which Annie is flinging towards him, and say if he be not as jealous as Othello? Nothing can pacify him but Mrs. Allen's notice and a dole from her hand. See, she is calling to him and feeding him, and now how he swells out his feathers, and flutters his wings, and erects his glossy neck, and struts and crows and pecks, proudest and happiest of bantams, the pet and glory of the poultry yard!



In the mean time my own pet May, who has all this while been peeping into every hole, and penetrating every nook and winding of the dell, in hopes to find another rabbit, has returned to my side, and is sliding her snake-like head into my hand, at once to invite the caress which she likes so well, and to intimate, with all due respect, that it is time to go home. The setting sun gives the same warning; and in a moment we are through the dell, the field, and the gate, past the farm and the mill, and hanging over the bridge that crosses the Loddon river.

What a sunset! how golden! how beautiful! The sun just disappearing, and the narrow liny clouds, which a few minutes ago lay like soft vapoury streaks along the horizon, lighted up with a golden splendour that the eye can scarcely endure, and those still softer clouds which floated above them wreathing and curling into a thousand fantastic

forms, as thin and changeful as summer smoke, now defined and deepened into grandeur, and edged with ineffable, insufferable light! Another minute and the brilliant orb totally disappears, and the sky above grows every moment more varied and more beautiful as the dazzling golden lines are mixed with glowing red and gorgeous purple, dappled with small dark specks, and mingled with such a blue as the egg of the hedge-sparrow. To look up at that glorious sky, and then to see that magnificent picture reflected in the clear and lovely Loddon water, is a pleasure never to be described and never forgotten. My heart swells and my eyes fill as I write of it, and think of the immeasurable majesty of nature, and the unspeakable goodness of God, who has spread an enjoyment so pure, so peaceful, and so intense before the meanest and the lowliest of His creatures.



THE OLD HOUSE AT ABERLEIGH.

JUNE 25th.—What a glowing glorious day! Summer in its richest prime, noon in its most sparkling brightness, little white clouds dappling the deep blue sky, and the sun, now partially veiled, and now bursting through them with an intensity of light! It would not do to walk to-day, professedly to walk,—we should be frightened at the very sound! and yet it is probable that we may be beguiled into a pretty long stroll before we return home. We are going to drive to the old house at Aberleigh, to spend the morning under the shade of those balmy firs, and amongst those luxuriant rose trees, and by the side of that brimming Loddon river. "Do not expect us before six o'clock," said I, as I left the house; "Six at soonest!" added my charming companion; and off we drove in our little pony chaise, drawn by our old mare, and with the good-humoured urchin, Henry's

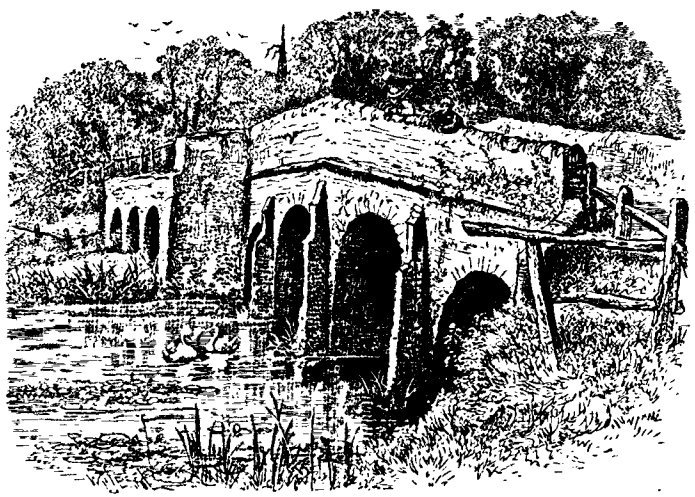
successor, a sort of younger Scrub, who takes care of horse and chaise, and cow and garden, for our charioteer.

My comrade in this homely equipage was a young lady of high family and higher endowments, to whom the novelty of the thing, and her own naturalness of character and simplicity of taste, gave an unspeakable enjoyment. She danced the little chaise up and down as she got into it, and laughed for very glee like a child. Lizzy herself could not have been more delighted. She praised the horse and the driver, and the roads and the scenery, and gave herself fully up to the enchantment of a rural excursion in the sweetest weather of this sweet season. I enjoyed all this too; for the road was pleasant to every sense, winding through narrow lanes, under high elms, and between hedges garlanded with woodbine and rose trees, whilst the air was scented with the delicious fragrance of blossomed beans. I enjoyed it all,—but, I believe, my principal pleasure was derived from my companion herself.

Emily I. is a person whom it is a privilege to know. She is quite like a creation of the older poets, and might pass for one of Shakspeare's or Fletcher's women stepped into life; just as tender, as playful, as gentle, and as kind. She is clever too, and has all the knowledge and accomplishments that a carefully-conducted education, acting on a mind of singular clearness and ductility, matured and improved by the very best company, can bestow. But one never thinks of her acquirements. It is the charming artless character, the bewitching sweetness of manner, the real and universal sympathy, the quick taste and the ardent feeling, that one loves in Emily. She is Irish by birth, and has in perfection the melting voice and soft caressing accent by which her fair countrywomen are distinguished. Moreover she is pretty—I think her beautiful, and so do all who have heard as well as seen her,—but pretty, very pretty, all the world must confess; and perhaps that is a distinction more enviable, because less envied, than the "palmy state" of

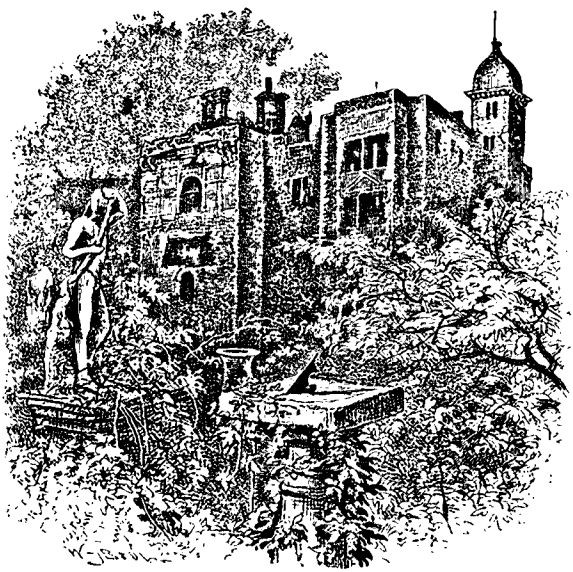
beauty. Her prettiness is of the prettiest kind—that of which the chief character is youthfulness. A short but pleasing figure, all grace and symmetry, a fair blooming face, beaming with intelligence and good-humour; the prettiest little feet and the whitest hands in the world;—such is Emily I.

She resides with her maternal grandmother, a venerable old lady, slightly shaken with the palsy; and when together, (and they are so fondly attached to each other that they are seldom parted,) it is one of the loveliest combinations of youth and age ever witnessed. There is no seeing them without feeling an increase of respect and affection for both grandmother and grand-daughter—always one of the tenderest and most beautiful of natural connexions—as Richardson knew when he made such exquisite use of it in his matchless book. I fancy that grandmamma Shirley must have been just such another venerable lady as Mrs. S., and our sweet Emily—Oh, no! Harriet Byron is not half good enough for her! There is nothing like her in the whole seven volumes.



But here we are at the bridge! Here we must alight! "This is the Loddon, Emily. Is it not a beautiful river? rising level with its banks, so clear, and smooth, and peaceful, giving back the verdant landscape and the bright blue sky, and bearing on its pellucid stream the snowy water-lily, the purest of flowers, which sits enthroned on its own cool leaves, looking chastity itself, like the lady in Comus. That queenly flower becomes the water, and so do the stately swans who are sailing so majestically down the stream, like those who

'On St. Mary's lake
Float double, swan and shadow.'



We must dismount here, and leave Richard to take care of our equipage under the shade of these trees, whilst we walk up to the house:—See there it is! We must cross this stile; there is no other way now."

And crossing the stile we were immediately in what had been a drive round a spacious park, and still retained something of the character, though the park itself had long been broken into arable fields,—and in full view of the Great House, a beautiful structure of James the First's time, whose glassless windows and dilapidated doors form a melancholy contrast with the strength and entireness of the rich and massive front.

The story of that ruin—for such it is—is always to me singularly affecting: It is that of the decay of an ancient and distinguished family, gradually reduced from the highest wealth and station to actual poverty. The house and park, and a small estate around it, were entailed on a distant cousin, and could not be alienated; and the late owner, the last of his name and lineage, after long struggling with debt and difficulty, farming his own lands, and clinging to his magnificent home with a love of place almost as tenacious as that of the younger Foscari, was at last forced to abandon it, retired to a paltry lodging in a paltry town, and died there about twenty years ago, broken-hearted. His successor, bound by no ties of association to the spot, and rightly judging the residence to be much too large for the diminished estate, immediately sold the superb fixtures, and would have entirely taken down the house, if, on making the attempt, the masonry had not been found so solid that the materials were not worth the labour. A great part, however, of one side is laid open, and the splendid chambers, with their carving and gilding, are exposed to the wind and rain—sad memorials of past grandeur! The grounds have been left in a merciful neglect; the park, indeed, is broken up, the lawn mown twice a year like a common hay-field, the grotto mouldering into ruin, and the fish-ponds choked with rushes and aquatic plants; but the shrubs and flowering trees are undestroyed, and have grown into a magnificence of size and wildness of beauty, such as we may imagine them to attain in their native forests. Nothing can exceed their luxuriance, especially in the spring, when the lilac, and laburnum, and double-cherry put forth

their gorgeous blossoms. There is a sweet sadness in the sight of such floweriness amidst such desolation; it seems the triumph of nature over the destructive power of man. The whole place, in that season more particularly, is full of a soft and soothing melancholy, reminding me, I scarcely know why, of some of the descriptions of natural scenery in the novels of Charlotte Smith, which I read when a girl, and which, perhaps, for that reason hang on my memory.

But here we are, in the smooth grassy ride, on the top of a steep turfy slope descending to the river, crowned with enormous firs and limes of equal growth, looking across the winding waters into a sweet peaceful landscape of quiet meadows, shut in by distant woods. What a fragrance is in the air from the balmy fir trees and the blossomed limes! What an intensity of odour! And what a murmur of bees in the lime trees! What a coil those little winged people make over our heads! And what a pleasant sound it is! the pleasantest of busy sounds, that which comes associated with all that is good and beautiful —industry and forecast, and sunshine and flowers. Surely these lime

trees might store a hundred hives; the very odour is of a honeyed richness, cloying, satiating.

Emily exclaimed in admiration as we stood under the deep, strong, leafy shadow, and still more when honeysuckles trailed their untrimmed profusion in our path, and roses, really trees, almost intercepted our passage.

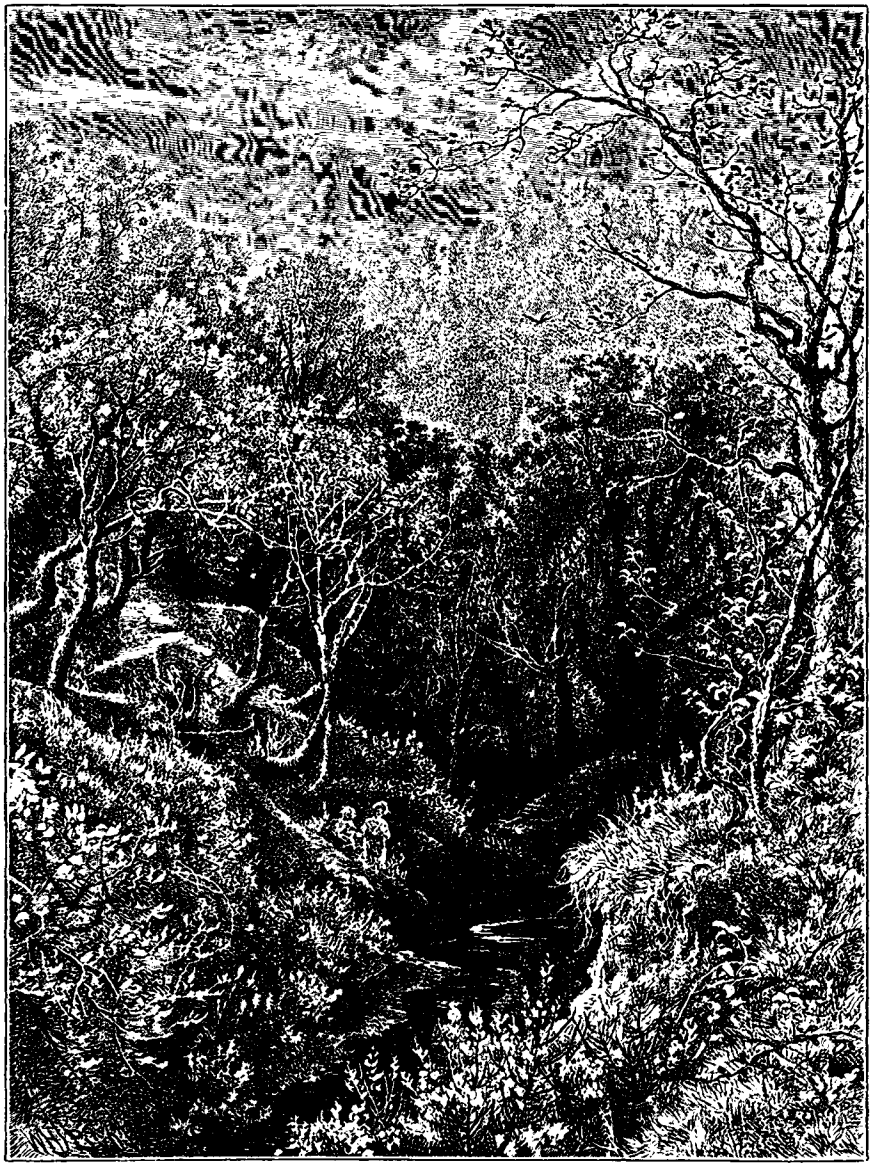
"On, Emily! farther yet! Force your way by that jessamine—it will yield; I will take care of this stubborn white rose bough."—"Take care of yourself! Pray take care," said my fairest friend; "let me hold back the branches."—After we had won our way through the strait, at some expense of veils and flounces, she stopped to contemplate and admire the tall graceful shrub, whose long thorny stems, spreading in every direction, had opposed our progress, and now waved their delicate clusters over our heads. "Did I ever think," exclaimed she, "of standing under the shadow of a white rose tree! What an exquisite fragrance! And what a beautiful flower! so pale, and white, and tender, and the petals thin and smooth as silk! What rose is it?"—"Don't you know? Did you never see it before? It is rare now, I believe, and seems rarer than it is, because it only blossoms in very hot summers; but this, Emily, is the musk rose,—that very musk rose of which Titania talks, and which is worthy of Shakspeare and of her. Is it not?—No! do not smell to it; it is less sweet so than other roses; but one cluster in a vase, or even that bunch in

your bosom, will perfume a large room, as it does the summer air."—"Oh! we will take twenty clusters," said Emily:—"I wish grandmamma were here! She talks so often of a musk rose tree that grew against one end of her father's house. I wish she were here to see this!"

Echoing her wish, and well laden with musk roses, planted perhaps in the days of Shakspeare, we reached the steps that led to a square summer-house or banqueting-room, overhanging the river: the under part was a boat-house, whose projecting roof, as well as the walls and the very top of the little tower, was covered with ivy and woodbine, and surmounted by tufted barberries, bird-cherries, acacias, covered with their snowy chains, and other pendent and flowering trees. Beyond

rose two poplars of unrivalled magnitude, towering like stately columns over the dark tall firs, and giving a sort of pillared and architectural grandeur to the scene.

We were now close to the mansion; but it looked sad and desolate, and the entrance, choked with brambles and nettles, seemed almost to repel our steps. The summer-house, the beautiful summer-house was



"NOW WE SEEM HEMMED IN BY THOSE GREEN CLIFFS, SHUT OUT FROM ALL THE WORLD."

free and open, and inviting, commanding from the unglazed windows, which hung high above the water, a reach of the river terminated by a rustic mill.

There we sat, emptying our little basket of fruit and country cakes, till Emily was seized with a desire of viewing, from the other side of the Loddon, the scenery which had so much enchanted her. "I must," said she, "take a sketch of the ivied boat-house, and of this sweet room, and this pleasant window;—Grandmamma would never be able to walk from the road to see the place itself, but she must see its likeness." So forth we sallied, not forgetting the dear musk roses.

We had no way of reaching the desired spot but by retracing our steps a mile, during the heat of the hottest hour of the day, and then following the course of the river to an equal distance on the other side;

nor had we any materials for sketching, except the rumpled paper which had contained our repast, and a pencil without a point which I happened to have about me. But these small difficulties are pleasures to gay and happy youth. Regardless of such obstacles, the sweet Emily bounded on like a fawn, and I followed, delighting in her delight. The sun went in, and the walk was delicious; a reviving coolness seemed to breathe over the water, wafting the balmy scent of the firs and limes; we found a point of view presenting the boat-house, the water, the poplars, and the mill, in a most felicitous combination; the little straw fruit basket made a capital table; and, refreshed and sharpened and pointed by our trusty lacquey's excellent knife, (your country boy is never without a good knife, it is his prime treasure,) the pencil did double duty;—first in the skilful hands of Emily, whose faithful and spirited sketch does equal honour to the scene and to the artist, and then in the humbler office of attempting a faint transcript of my own impressions in the following sonnet:—

It was an hour of calmest noon, a day
  Of ripest summer: o'er the deep blue sky
  White speckled clouds came sailing peacefully,
Half-shrouding in a chequer'd veil the ray
Of the sun, too ardent else,—what time we lay
  By the smooth Loddon, opposite the high
  Steep bank, which as a coronet gloriously
Wore its rich crest of firs and lime trees, gay
  With their pale tassels; while from out a bower
Of ivy (where those column'd poplars rear
  Their heads) the ruin'd boat-house, like a tower,
Flung its deep shadow on the waters clear.
  My Emily! forget not that calm hour,
Nor that fair scene, by thee made doubly dear.

THE SHAW.

SEPTEMBER 9th.—A bright sunshiny afternoon. What a comfort it is to get out again—to see once more that rarity of rarities, a fine day! We English people are accused of talking overmuch of the weather; but the weather, this summer, has forced people to talk of it. Summer! did I say? Oh! season most unworthy of that sweet, sunny name! Season of coldness and cloudiness, of gloom and rain! A worse November!—for in November the days are short; and shut up in a warm room, lighted by that household sun, a lamp, one feels through the long evenings comfortably independent of the out-of-door tempests. But though we may have, and did have, fires all through the dog-days, there is no shutting out day-light; and sixteen hours of rain, pattering against the windows and dripping from the eaves—sixteen hours of rain, not merely audible, but visible, for seven days in the week—would

be enough to exhaust the patience of Job or Grizzel; especially if Job were a farmer, and Grizzel a country gentlewoman. Never was known such a season! Hay swimming, cattle drowning, fruit rotting, corn spoiling! and that naughty river, the Loddon, who never can take Puff's advice, and "keep between its banks," running about the country, fields, roads, gardens, and houses, like mad! The weather would be talked of. Indeed, it was not easy to talk of anything else. A friend of mine having occasion to write me a letter, thought it worth abusing in rhyme, and bepommelled it through three pages of Bath-guide verse; of which I subjoin a specimen:—

"Aquarius surely *reigns* over the world,
And of late he his water-pot strangely has twirl'd;
Or he's taken a cullender up by mistake,
And unceasingly dips it in some mighty lake;
Though it is not in Lethe—for who can forget
The annoyance of getting most thoroughly wet?
It must be in the river called Styx, I declare,
For the moment it drizzles it makes the men swear.
'It did rain to-morrow,' is growing good grammar;
Vauxhall and camp stools have been brought to the hammer;
A pony gondola is all I can keep,
And I use my umbrella and pattens in sleep:
Row out of my window, whene'er 'tis my whim
To visit a friend, and just ask, 'Can you swim?'"

So far my friend. In short, whether in prose or in verse, everybody railed at the weather. But this is over now. The sun has come to dry the world; mud is turned into dust; rivers have retreated to their proper limits; farmers have left off grumbling; and we are about to take a walk, as usual, as far as the Shaw, a pretty wood about a mile off. But one of our companions being a stranger to the gentle reader, we must do him the honour of an introduction.

Dogs, when they are sure of having their own way, have sometimes ways as odd as those of the unfurred, unfeathered animals, who walk on

two legs, and talk, and are called rational. My beautiful white greyhound, Mayflower, for instance, is as whimsical as the finest lady in the land. Amongst her other fancies, she has taken a violent affection for a most hideous stray dog, who made his appearance here about six months ago, and contrived to pick up a living in the village, one can hardly tell how. Now appealing to the charity of old Rachel Strong, the laundress—a dog-lover by profession; now winning a meal from the light-footed and open-hearted lasses at the Rose; now standing on his hind-legs, to extort by sheer beggary a scanty morsel from some pair of "droughty cronies," or solitary drover, discussing his dinner or supper on the ale-house bench; now catching a mouthful, flung to him in pure contempt by some scornful gentleman of the shoulder-knot, mounted on his throne, the coach-box, whose notice he had attracted by dint of ugliness; now sharing the commons of Master Keep the shoemaker's pigs; now succeeding to the reversion of the well-gnawed bone of Master Brown the shopkeeper's fierce house-dog; now filching the skim-milk of Dame Wheeler's cat:—spit at by the cat; worried by the mastiff; chased by the pigs; screamed at by the dame; stormed at by the shoemaker; flogged by the shopkeeper;—teased by all the children, and scouted by all the animals of the parish;—but yet living through his griefs, and bearing them patiently, "for sufferance is the badge of all his tribe;"—and even seeming to find, in an occasional full meal, or a gleam of sunshine, or a wisp of dry straw on which to repose his sorry carcase, some comfort in his disconsolate condition.

In this plight was he found by May, the most high-blooded and aristocratic of greyhounds; and from this plight did May rescue him;—invited him into her territory, the stable; resisted all attempts to turn him out; reinstated him there, in spite of maid and boy, and mistress and master; wore out everybody's opposition, by the activity of her protection, and the pertinacity of her self-will; made him sharer of her bed and of her mess; and, finally, established him as one of the family as firmly as herself.

Dash—for he has even won himself a name amongst us, before he was anonymous—Dash is a sort of a kind of a spaniel; at least there is in his mongrel composition some sign of that beautiful race. Besides his ugliness, which is of the worst sort—that is to say, the shabbiest—he has a limp on one leg that gives a peculiarly one-sided awkwardness to his gait; but independently of his great merit in being May's pet, he has other merits which serve to account for that phenomenon—being,

beyond all comparison, the most faithful, attached, and affectionate animal that I have ever known; and that is saying much. He seems to think it necessary to atone for his ugliness by extra good conduct, and does so dance on his lame leg, and so wag his scrubby tail, that it does any one who has a taste for happiness good to look at him—so that he may now be said to stand on his own footing. We are all rather ashamed of him when strangers come in the way, and think it necessary to explain that he is May's pet; but amongst ourselves, and those who are used to his appearance, he has reached the point of favouritism in his own person. I have, in common with wiser women, the feminine weakness of loving whatever loves me—and, therefore, I like Dash. His master has found out that he is a capital finder, and in spite of his lameness will hunt a field or beat a cover with any spaniel in England—and, therefore, *he* likes Dash. The boy has fought a battle, in defence of his beauty, with another boy, bigger than himself, and beat his opponent most handsomely—and, therefore, *he* likes Dash; and the maids like him, or pretend to like him, because we do—as is the fashion of that pliant and imitative class. And now Dash and May follow us everywhere, and are going with us to the Shaw, as I said before—or rather to the cottage by the Shaw, to bespeak milk and butter of our little dairy-woman, Hannah Bint—a housewifely occupation, to which we owe some of our pleasantest rambles.

And now we pass the sunny, dusty village street—who would have thought, a month ago, that we should complain of sun and dust again! —and turn the corner, where the two great oaks hang so beautifully over the clear deep pond, mixing their cool green shadows with the bright blue sky, and the white clouds that flit over it; and loiter at the wheeler's shop, always picturesque, with its tools, and its work, and its materials, all so various in form, and so harmonious in colour; and its noisy, merry workmen, hammering and singing, and making a various harmony also. The shop is rather empty to-day, for its usual

inmates are busy on the green beyond the pond—one set building a cart, another painting a waggon. And then we leave the village quite behind, and proceed slowly up the cool, quiet lane, between tall hedgerows of the darkest verdure, overshadowing banks green and fresh as an emerald.

Not so quick as I expected, though—for they are shooting here to-day, as Dash and I have both discovered: he with great delight, for a gun to him is as a trumpet to a war-horse; I with no less annoyance, for I don't think that a partridge itself, barring the accident of being killed, can be more startled than I at that abominable explosion. Dash has certainly better blood in his veins than any one would guess to look at him. He even shows some inclination to elope into the fields, in pursuit of those noisy iniquities. But he is an orderly person after all, and a word has checked him.

Ah! here is a shriller din mingling with the small artillery—a shriller

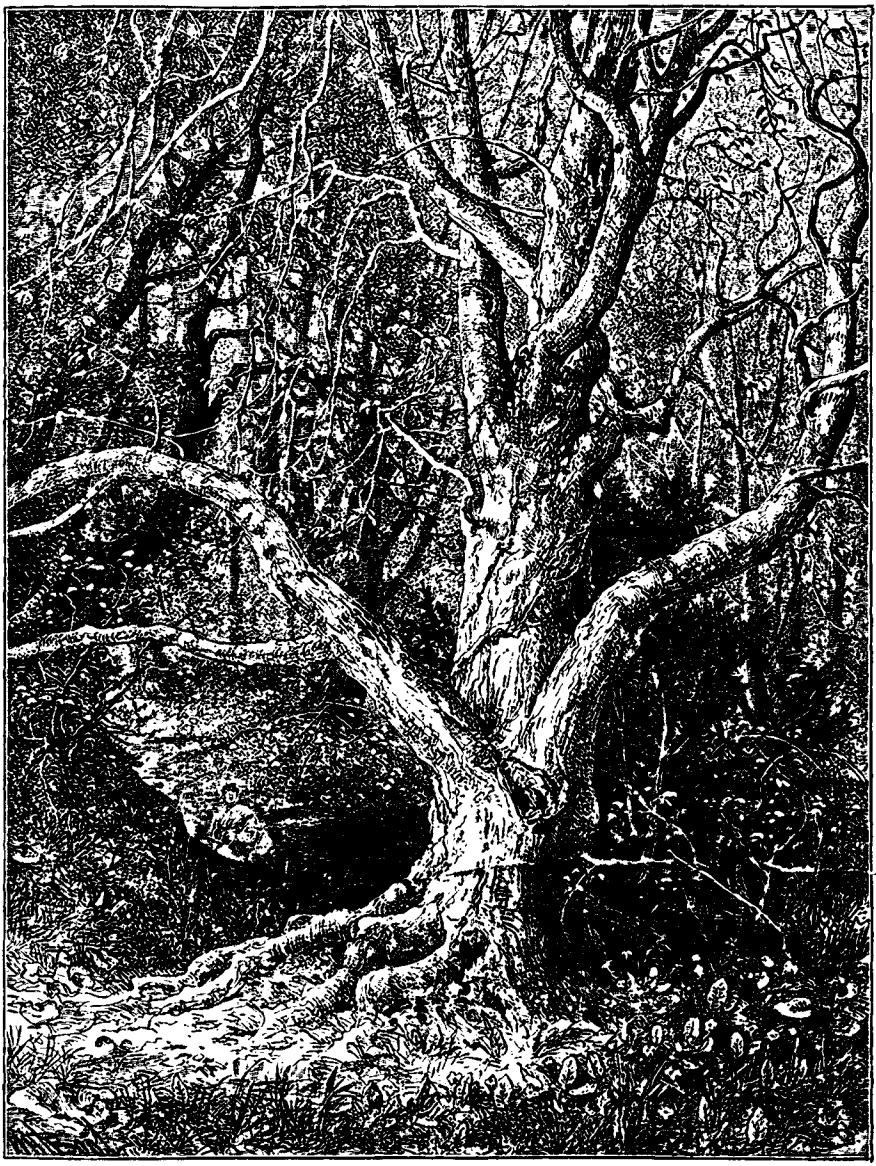
"AND CRIED, 'DADDY! DADDY!' AND SPRANG INTO HIS ARMS."

and more continuous. We are not yet arrived within sight of Master Weston's cottage, snugly hidden behind a clump of elms; but we are in full hearing of Dame Weston's tongue, raised as usual to scolding pitch. The Westons are new arrivals in our neighbourhood, and the first thing heard of them was a complaint from the wife to our magistrate of her husband's beating her: it was a regular charge of assault—an information in full form. A most piteous case did Dame Weston make of it, softening her voice for the nonce into a shrill tremulous whine, and exciting the mingled pity and anger—pity towards herself, anger towards her husband—of the whole female world, pitiful and indignant as the female world is wont to be on such occasions. Every woman in the parish railed at Master Weston; and poor Master Weston was summoned to attend the bench on the ensuing Saturday, and answer the charge; and such was the clamour abroad and at home, that the unlucky culprit, terrified at the sound of a warrant and a constable, ran away, and was not heard of for a fortnight.

At the end of that time he was discovered, and brought to the bench; and Dame Weston again told her story, and, as before, on the full cry. She had no witnesses, and the bruises of which she made complaint had disappeared, and there were no women present to make common cause with the sex. Still, however, the general feeling was against Master Weston; and it would have gone hard with him when he was called in, if a most unexpected witness had not risen up in his favour. His wife had brought in her arms a little girl about eighteen months old, partly perhaps to move compassion in her favour; for a woman with a child in her arms is always an object that excites kind feelings. The little girl had looked shy and frightened, and had been as quiet as a lamb during her mother's examination; but she no sooner saw her father, from whom she had been a fortnight separated, than she clapped her hands, and laughed, and cried, "Daddy! daddy!" and sprang into his arms, and hung round his neck, and covered him with

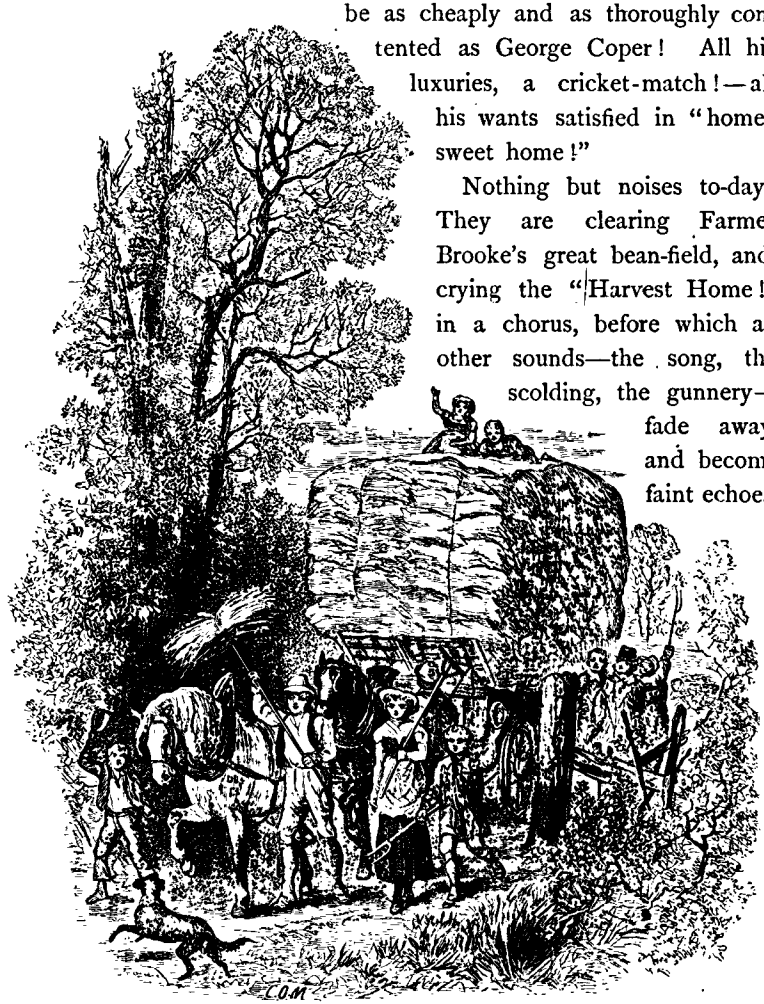
kisses—again shouting, "Daddy, come home! daddy! daddy!"—and finally nestled her little head in his bosom, with a fulness of contentment, an assurance of tenderness and protection such as no wife-beating tyrant ever did inspire, or ever could inspire, since the days of King Solomon. Our magistrates acted in the very spirit of the Jewish monarch: they accepted the evidence of nature, and dismissed the complaint. And subsequent events have fully justified their decision; Mistress Weston proving not only renowned for the feminine accomplishment of scolding, (tongue-banging, it is called in our parts, a compound word which deserves to be Greek,) but is actually herself addicted to administering the conjugal discipline, the infliction of which she was pleased to impute to her luckless husband.

Now we cross the stile, and walk up the fields to the Shaw. How beautifully green this pasture looks! and how finely the evening sun glances between the boles of that clump of trees, beech, and ash, and aspen! and how sweet the hedgerows are with woodbine and wild scabious, or, as the country people call it, the gipsy-rose! Here is little Dolly Weston, the unconscious witness, with cheeks as red as a real rose, tottering up the path to meet her father. And here is the carrotty-polled urchin, George Coper, returning from work, and singing "Home! sweet Home!" at the top of his voice; and then, when the notes prove too high for him, continuing the air in a whistle, until he has turned the impassable corner; then taking up again the song and the words, "Home! sweet Home!" and looking as if he felt their full import, ploughboy though he be. And so he does; for he is one of a large, an honest, a kind, and an industrious family, where all goes well, and where the poor ploughboy is sure of finding cheerful



"How boldly that superb ash-tree with its fine silver bark rises from the bank."

faces and coarse comforts—all that he has learned to desire. Oh, to be as cheaply and as thoroughly contented as George Coper! All his luxuries, a cricket-match!—all his wants satisfied in "home! sweet home!"

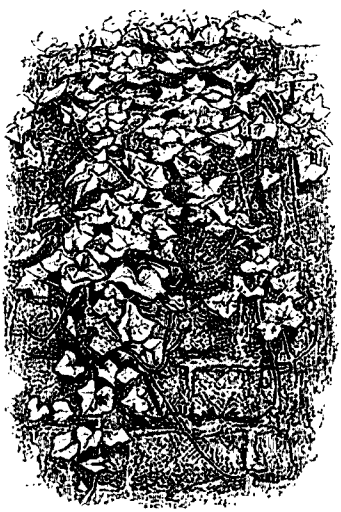


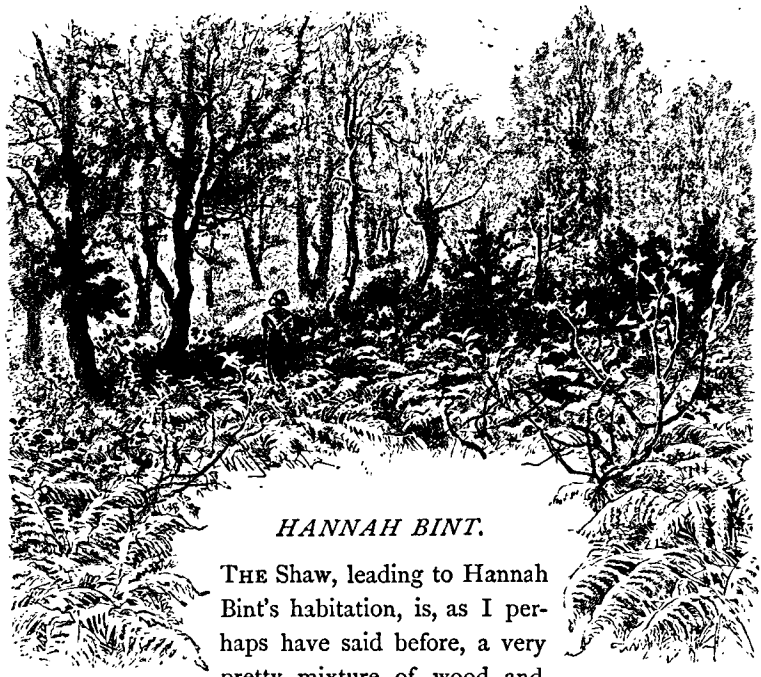
Nothing but noises to-day! They are clearing Farmer Brooke's great bean-field, and, crying the "Harvest Home!" in a chorus, before which all other sounds—the song, the scolding, the gunnery—fade away, and become faint echoes.

A pleasant noise is that! though, for one's ears' sake, one makes some haste to get away from it. And here, in happy time, is that pretty wood, the Shaw, with its broad pathway, its tangled dingles, its nuts and its honeysuckles;—and, carrying away a faggot of those sweetest flowers, we reach Hannah Bint's: of whom, and of whose doings, we shall say more another time.

NOTE.—Poor Dash is also dead. We did not keep him long, indeed I believe that he died of the transition from starvation to good feed, as dangerous to a dog's stomach and to most stomachs, as the less agreeable change from good feed to starvation. He has been succeeded in place and favour by another Dash, not less amiable in demeanour and far more creditable in appearance, bearing no small resemblance to the pet spaniel of my friend Master Dinely, he who stole the bone from the magpies, and who figures as the first Dash of this volume. Let not the unwary reader opine, that in assigning the same name to three several individuals, I am acting as an humble imitator of the inimitable writer who has given immortality to the Peppers and the Mustards, on the one hand; or showing a poverty of invention or a want of acquaintance with the bead-roll of canine appellations on the other. I merely, with my usual scrupulous fidelity, take the names as I find them. The fact is that half the handsome spaniels in England are called Dash, just as half the tall footmen are called Thomas. The name belongs to the species. Sitting in an open carriage one day last summer at the door of a farm-house where my father had some business, I saw a noble and beautiful animal of this kind lying in great state and laziness on the steps, and felt an immediate desire to make acquaintance with him.

My father, who had had the same fancy, had patted him and called him "poor fellow" in passing, without eliciting the smallest notice in return. "Dash!" cried I at a venture, "good Dash! noble Dash!" and up he started in a moment, making but one spring from the door into the gig. Of course I was right in my guess. The gentleman's name was Dash.





HANNAH BINT.

THE Shaw, leading to Hannah Bint's habitation, is, as I perhaps have said before, a very pretty mixture of wood and coppice; that is to say, a tract of thirty or forty acres covered with fine growing timber—ash, and oak, and elm, very regularly planted; and interspersed here and there with large patches of underwood, hazel, maple, birch, holly, and hawthorn, woven into almost impenetrable thickets by long wreaths of the bramble, the briony, and the brier-rose, or by the pliant and twisting garlands of the wild honeysuckle. In other parts, the Shaw is quite clear of its bosky undergrowth, and clothed only with large beds of feathery fern, or carpets of flowers, primroses, orchises, cowslips, ground-ivy, crane's bill, cotton-grass, Solomon's seal, and forget-me-not, crowded together with a profusion and brilliancy of colour, such as I have rarely seen equalled even in a garden.

Here the wild hyacinth really enamels the ground with its fresh and lovely purple; there,

> "On aged roots, with bright green mosses clad,
> Dwells the wood-sorrel, with its bright thin leaves
> Heart-shaped and triply folded, and its root
> Creeping like beaded coral; whilst around
> Flourish the copse's pride, anemones,
> With rays like golden studs on ivory laid
> Most delicate; but touch'd with purple clouds,
> Fit crown for April's fair but changeful brow."

The variety is much greater than I have enumerated; for the ground is so unequal, now swelling in gentle ascents, now dimpling into dells and hollows, and the soil so different in different parts, that the sylvan Flora is unusually extensive and complete.

The season is, however, now too late for this floweriness; and except the tufted woodbines, which have continued in bloom during the whole of this lovely autumn, and some lingering garlands of the purple wild veitch, wreathing round the thickets, and uniting with the ruddy leaves of the bramble, and the pale festoons of the briony, there is little to call one's attention from the grander beauties of the trees—the sycamore, its broad leaves already spotted—the oak, heavy with acorns—and the delicate shining rind of the weeping birch, "the lady of the woods," thrown out in strong relief from a background of holly and hawthorn, each studded with coral berries, and backed with old beeches, beginning to assume the rich tawny hue which makes them perhaps the most picturesque of autumnal trees, as the transparent freshness of their young foliage is undoubtedly the choicest ornament of the forest in spring.

A sudden turn round one of these magnificent beeches brings us to the boundary of the Shaw, and leaning upon a rude gate, we look over an open space of about ten acres of ground, still more varied and broken than that which we have passed, and surrounded on all sides by thick woodland. As a piece of colour, nothing can be well finer. The ruddy

glow of the heath-flower, contrasting, on the one hand, with the golden-blossomed furze—on the other, with a patch of buck-wheat, of which the bloom is not past, although the grain be ripening, the beautiful buck-wheat, whose transparent leaves and stalks are so brightly tinged with vermilion, while the delicate pink-white of the flower, a paler persicaria, has a feathery fall, at once so rich and so graceful, and a fresh and reviving odour, like that of birch trees in the dew of a May evening.

The bank that surmounts this attempt at cultivation is crowned with the late fox-glove and the stately mullein; the pasture of which so great a part of the waste consists, looks as green as an emerald; a clear pond, with the bright sky reflected in it, lets light into the picture; the white cottage of the keeper peeps from the opposite coppice; and the vine-

covered dwelling of Hannah Bint rises from amidst the pretty garden, which lies bathed in the sunshine around it.

The living and moving accessories are all in keeping with the cheerfulness and repose of the landscape. Hannah's cow grazing quietly beside the keeper's pony; a brace of fat pointer puppies holding amicable intercourse with a litter of young pigs; ducks, geese, cocks,

hens, and chickens scattered over the turf; Hannah herself sallying forth from the cottage-door, with her milk-bucket in her hand, and her little brother following with the milking-stool.

My friend, Hannah Bint, is by no means an ordinary person. Her father, Jack Bint, (for in all his life he never arrived at the dignity of

being called John, indeed in our parts he was commonly known by the cognomen of London Jack,) was a drover of high repute in his profession. No man, between Salisbury Plain and Smithfield, was thought to conduct a flock of sheep so skilfully through all the difficulties of lanes and commons, streets and high-roads, as Jack Bint, aided by Jack Bint's famous dog, Watch; for Watch's rough, honest face, black, with a little white about the muzzle, and one white ear, was as well known at fairs and markets, as his master's equally honest and weather-beaten visage. Lucky was the dealer that could secure their services; Watch being renowned for keeping a flock together better than any shepherd's dog on the road—Jack for delivering them more punctually, and in better condition. No man had a more thorough knowledge of the proper night stations, where good feed might be procured for his charge, and good liquor for Watch and himself; Watch, like other sheep dogs, being accustomed to live chiefly on bread and beer. His master, though not averse to a pot of good double X, preferred gin; and they who plod slowly along, through wet and weary ways, in frost and in fog, have undoubtedly a stronger temptation to indulge in that cordial and reviving stimulus than we water-drinkers, sitting in warm and comfortable rooms can readily imagine. For certain, our drover could never resist the gentle seduction of the gin-bottle, and being of a free, merry, jovial temperament, one of those persons commonly called good fellows, who like to see others happy in the same way with themselves, he was apt to circulate it at his own expense, to the great improvement of his popularity, and the great detriment of his finances.

All this did vastly well whilst his earnings continued proportionate to his spendings, and the little family at home were comfortably

supported by his industry: but when a rheumatic fever came on, one hard winter, and finally settled in his limbs, reducing the most active and hardy man in the parish to the state of a confirmed cripple, then his reckless improvidence stared him in the face; and poor Jack, a thoughtless, but kind creature, and a most affectionate father, looked at his three motherless children with the acute misery of a parent, who has

brought those whom he loves best in the world to abject destitution. He found help, where he probably least expected it, in the sense and spirit of his young daughter, a girl of twelve years old.

Hannah was the eldest of the family, and had, ever since her mother's death, which event had occurred two or three years before, been accustomed to take the direction of their domestic concerns, to manage her two brothers, to feed the pigs and the poultry, and to keep house during the almost constant absence of her father. She was a quick, clever lass, of a high spirit, a firm temper, some pride, and a horror of

accepting parochial relief, which is every day becoming rarer amongst the peasantry; but which forms the surest safeguard to the sturdy independence of the English character. Our little damsel possessed this quality in perfection; and when her father talked of giving up their comfortable cottage, and removing to the workhouse, whilst she and her brothers must go to service, Hannah formed a bold resolution, and without disturbing the sick man by any participation of her hopes and fears, proceeded after settling their trifling affairs to act at once on her own plans and designs.

Careless of the future as the poor drover had seemed, he had yet kept clear of debt, and by subscribing constantly to a benefit club, had secured a pittance that might at least assist in supporting him during the long years of sickness and helplessness to which he was doomed to look forward. This his daughter knew. She knew also that the employer in whose service his health had suffered so severely, was a rich and liberal cattle-dealer in the neighbourhood, who would willingly aid an old and faithful servant, and had, indeed, come forward with offers of money. To assistance from such a quarter Hannah saw no objection. Farmer Oakley and the parish were quite distinct things. Of him, accordingly, she asked, not money, but something much more in his own way—"a cow! any cow! old or lame, or what not, so that it were a cow! she would be bound to keep it well; if she did not, he might take it back again. She even hoped to pay for it by and by, by instalments, but that she would not promise!" and, partly amused, partly interested by the child's earnestness, the wealthy yeoman gave her, not as a purchase, but as a present, a very fine young Alderney. She then went to the lord of the manor, and, with equal knowledge of character, begged his permission to keep her cow on the Shaw common. "Farmer Oakley had given her a fine Alderney, and she would be bound to pay the rent, and keep her father off the parish, if he would only let it graze on the waste;" and he, too, half from real good nature

—half, not to be outdone in liberality by his tenant, not only granted the requested permission, but reduced the rent so much, that the produce of the vine seldom fails to satisfy their kind landlord.

Now, Hannah showed great judgment in setting up as a dairy-woman. She could not have chosen an occupation more completely unoccupied, or more loudly called for. One of the most provoking of the petty difficulties which beset people with a small establishment in this neighbourhood, is the trouble, almost the impossibility, of procuring the pastoral luxuries of milk, eggs, and butter, which rank, unfortunately, amongst the indispensable necessaries of housekeeping. To your thoroughbred Londoner, who, whilst grumbling over his own breakfast, is apt to fancy that thick cream, and fresh butter, and new-laid eggs, grow, so to say, in the country—form an actual part of its natural produce—it may be some comfort to learn, that in this great grazing district, however the calves and the farmers may be the better for cows,

nobody else is; that farmers' wives have ceased to keep poultry; and that we unlucky villagers sit down often to our first meal in a state of destitution, which may well make him content with his thin milk and his Cambridge butter, when compared to our imputed pastoralities.

Hannah's Alderney restored us to one rural privilege. Never was so cleanly a little milk-maid. She changed away some of the cottage finery, which, in his prosperous days, poor Jack had pleased himself with bringing home, the China tea-service, the gilded mugs, and the painted waiters, for the useful utensils of the dairy, and speedily established a regular and gainful trade in milk, eggs, butter, honey, and poultry—for poultry they had always kept.

Her domestic management prospered equally. Her father, who retained the perfect use of his hands, began a manufacture of mats and baskets, which he constructed with great nicety and adroitness; the

eldest boy, a sharp and clever lad, cut for him his rushes and osiers; erected, under his sister's direction, a shed for the cow, and enlarged and cultivated the garden (always with the good leave of her kind patron the lord of the manor) until it became so ample, that the produce not only kept the pig, and half kept the family, but afforded another branch of merchandise to the indefatigable directress of the establishment. For the younger boy, less quick and active, Hannah contrived to obtain an admission to the charity-school, where he made great progress—retaining him at home, however, in the hay-making, and leasing season, or whenever his services could be made available, to the great annoyance of the schoolmaster, whose favourite he is, and who piques himself so much on George's scholarship, (your heavy sluggish boy at country work often turns out quick at his book,) that it is the general opinion that this much-vaunted pupil will, in process of time, be promoted to the post of assistant, and may, possibly, in course of years, rise to the dignity of a parish pedagogue in his own person; so that his sister, although still making him useful at odd times, now considers George as pretty well off her hands, whilst his elder brother, Tom, could take an under-gardener's place directly, if he were not too important at home to be spared even for a day.

In short, during the five years that she has ruled at the Shaw cottage, the world has gone well with Hannah Bint. Her cow, her calves, her pigs, her bees, her poultry, have each, in their several ways, thriven and prospered. She has even brought Watch to like buttermilk, as well as strong beer, and has nearly persuaded her father (to whose wants and wishes she is most anxiously attentive) to accept of milk as a substitute for gin. Not but Hannah hath had her enemies as well as her betters. Why should she not? The old woman at the lodge, who always piqued herself on being spiteful, and crying down new ways, foretold from the first she would come to no good, and could not forgive her for falsifying her prediction; and Betty Barnes, the slatternly widow of a tippling

farmer, who rented a field, and set up a cow herself, and was universally discarded for insufferable dirt, said all that the wit of an envious woman could devise against Hannah and her Alderney; nay, even Ned Miles, the keeper, her next neighbour, who had whilom held entire sway over the Shaw common, as well as its coppices, grumbled as much as so good-natured and genial a person could grumble, when he found a little girl sharing his dominion, a cow grazing beside his pony, and vulgar cocks and hens hovering around the buck-wheat destined to feed his noble pheasants. Nobody that had been accustomed to see that paragon of keepers, so tall and manly, and pleasant looking, with his merry eye, and his knowing smile, striding gaily along, in his green coat, and his gold-laced hat, with Neptune, his noble Newfoundland dog, (a retriever is the sporting word,) and his beautiful spaniel Flirt at his heels, could conceive how askew he looked, when he first found Hannah and Watch holding equal reign over his old territory, the Shaw common.

Yes! Hannah hath had her enemies; but they are passing away. The old woman at the lodge is dead, poor creature; and Betty Barnes, having herself taken to tippling, has lost the few friends she once possessed, and looks, luckless wretch, as if she would soon die too!—and the keeper?—why, he is not dead, or like to die; but the change that has taken place there is the most astonishing of all—except, perhaps, the change in Hannah herself.

Few damsels of twelve years old, generally a very pretty age, were less pretty than Hannah Bint. Short and stunted in her figure, thin in face, sharp in feature, with a muddled complexion, wild sun-burnt hair, and eyes whose very brightness had in them something startling, over-informed, supersubtle, too clever for her age,—at twelve years old she had quite the air of a little old fairy. Now, at seventeen, matters are mended. Her complexion has cleared; her countenance has developed itself; her figure has shot up into height and lightness, and a sort

of rustic grace; her bright, acute eye is softened and sweetened by the womanly wish to please; her hair is trimmed, and curled and brushed, with exquisite neatness; and her whole dress arranged with that nice attention to the becoming, the suitable both in form and texture, which would be called the highest degree of coquetry, if it did not deserve the better name of propriety. Never was such a transmogrification beheld. The lass is really pretty, and Ned Miles has discovered that she is so. There he stands, the rogue, close at her side, (for he hath joined her whilst we have been telling her little story, and the milking is over!)—there he stands—holding her milk-pail in one hand, and stroking Watch with the other; whilst she is returning the compliment, by patting Neptune's magnificent head. There they stand, as much like lovers as may be; he smiling, and she blushing—he never looking so handsome nor she so pretty in all their lives. There they stand, in blessed forgetfulness of all except each other; as happy a couple as ever trod the earth. There they stand, and one would not disturb them for all the milk and butter in Christendom. I should not wonder if they were fixing the wedding day.

"There they stand, as much like lovers as may be, he smiling, and she blushing, he never looking so handsome nor she so pretty in all their lives."

P. 162.

THE FALL OF THE LEAF.

NOVEMBER 6th.—The weather is as peaceful to-day, as calm, and as mild, as in early April; and, perhaps, an autumn afternoon and a spring morning do resemble each other more in feeling, and even in appearance, than any two periods of the year. There is in both the same freshness and dewiness of the herbage; the same balmy softness in the air; and the same pure and lovely blue sky, with white fleecy clouds floating across it. The chief difference lies in the absence of flowers, and the presence of leaves. But then the foliage of November is so rich, and glowing, and varied, that it may well supply the place of the gay blossoms of the spring; whilst all the flowers of the field or the garden could never make amends for the want of leaves,—that beautiful and graceful attire in which nature has clothed the rugged forms of trees—the verdant drapery to which the landscape owes its loveliness, and the forests their glory.

If choice must be between two seasons, each so full of charm, it is

at least no bad philosophy to prefer the present good, even whilst looking gratefully back, and hopefully forward, to the past and the future. And of a surety, no fairer specimen of a November day could well be found than this,—a day made to wander

> "By yellow commons and birch-shaded hollows,
> And hedgerows bordering unfrequented lanes;"

nor could a prettier country be found for our walk than this shady and yet sunny Berkshire, where the scenery, without rising into grandeur or breaking into wildness, is so peaceful, so cheerful, so varied, and so thoroughly English.

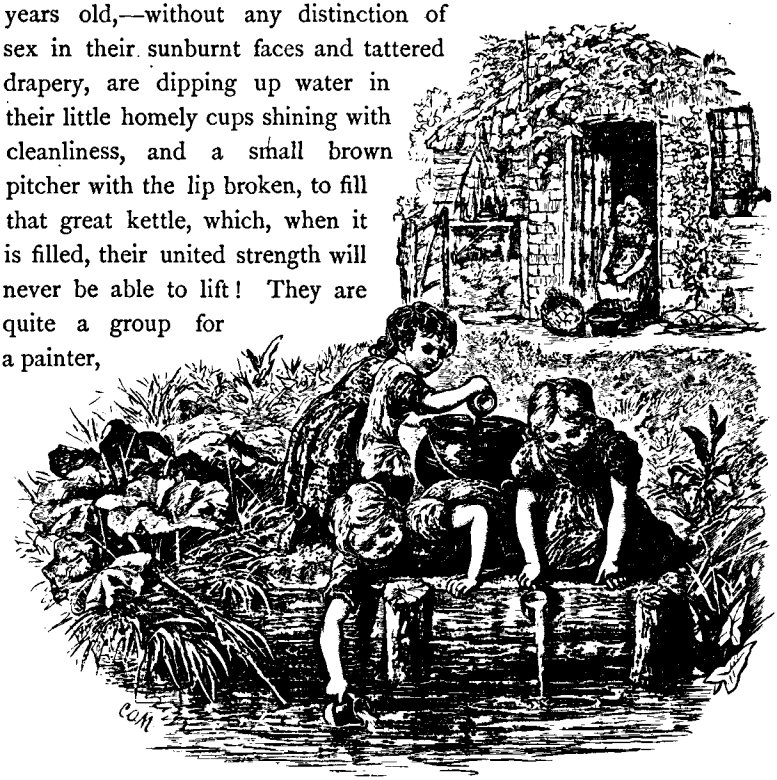
We must bend our steps towards the water-side, for I have a message to leave at Farmer Riley's: and sooth to say, it is no unpleasant necessity; for the road thither is smooth and dry, retired, as one likes a

country walk to be, but not too lonely, which women never like; leading past the Loddon—the bright, brimming, transparent Loddon—a fitting mirror for this bright blue sky, and terminating at one of the prettiest and most comfortable farm-houses in the neighbourhood.

How beautiful the lane is to-day, decorated with a thousand colours! The brown road, and the rich verdure that borders it, strewed with the pale yellow leaves of the elm, just beginning to fall; hedgerows glowing with long wreaths of the bramble in every variety of purplish red; and overhead the unchanged green of the fir, contrasting with the spotted sycamore, the tawny beech, and the dry sere leaves of the oak, which rustle as the light wind passes through them; a few common hardy yellow flowers, (for yellow is the common colour of flowers, whether wild or cultivated, as blue is the rare one,) flowers of many sorts, but almost of one tint, still blowing in spite of the season, and ruddy berries glowing through all. How very beautiful is the lane!

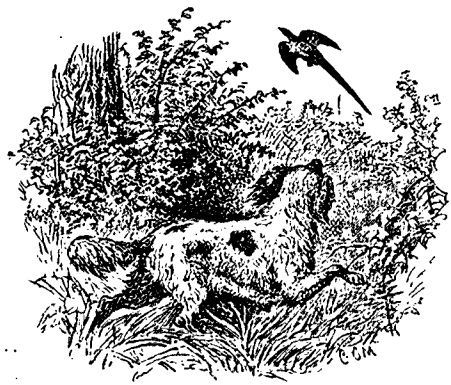
And how pleasant is this hill where the road widens, with the group of cattle by the way-side, and George Hearn, the little post-boy, trundling his hoop at full speed, making all the better haste in his work,

because he cheats himself into thinking it play! And how beautiful, again, is this patch of common at the hill-top with the clear pool, where Martha Pither's children,—elves of three, and four, and five years old,—without any distinction of sex in their sunburnt faces and tattered drapery, are dipping up water in their little homely cups shining with cleanliness, and a small brown pitcher with the lip broken, to fill that great kettle, which, when it is filled, their united strength will never be able to lift! They are quite a group for a painter,



with their rosy cheeks, and chubby hands, and round merry faces; and the low cottage in the back-ground, peeping out of its vine leaves and china roses, with Martha at the door, tidy, and comely, and smiling, preparing the potatoes for the pot, and watching the progress of dipping and filling that useful utensil, completes the picture.

But we must get on. No time for more sketches in these short days. It is getting cold too. We must proceed in our walk. Dash is showing us the way and beating the thick double hedgerow that runs along the side of the meadows, at a rate that indicates game astir, and causes the leaves to fly as fast as an east-wind after a hard frost. Ah! a pheasant! a superb cock pheasant! Nothing is more certain than Dash's questing, whether in a hedgerow or covert, for a better spaniel never went into the field; but I fancied that it was a hare afoot, and was almost as much startled to hear the whirring of those splendid wings, as the princely bird himself would have been at the report of a gun.

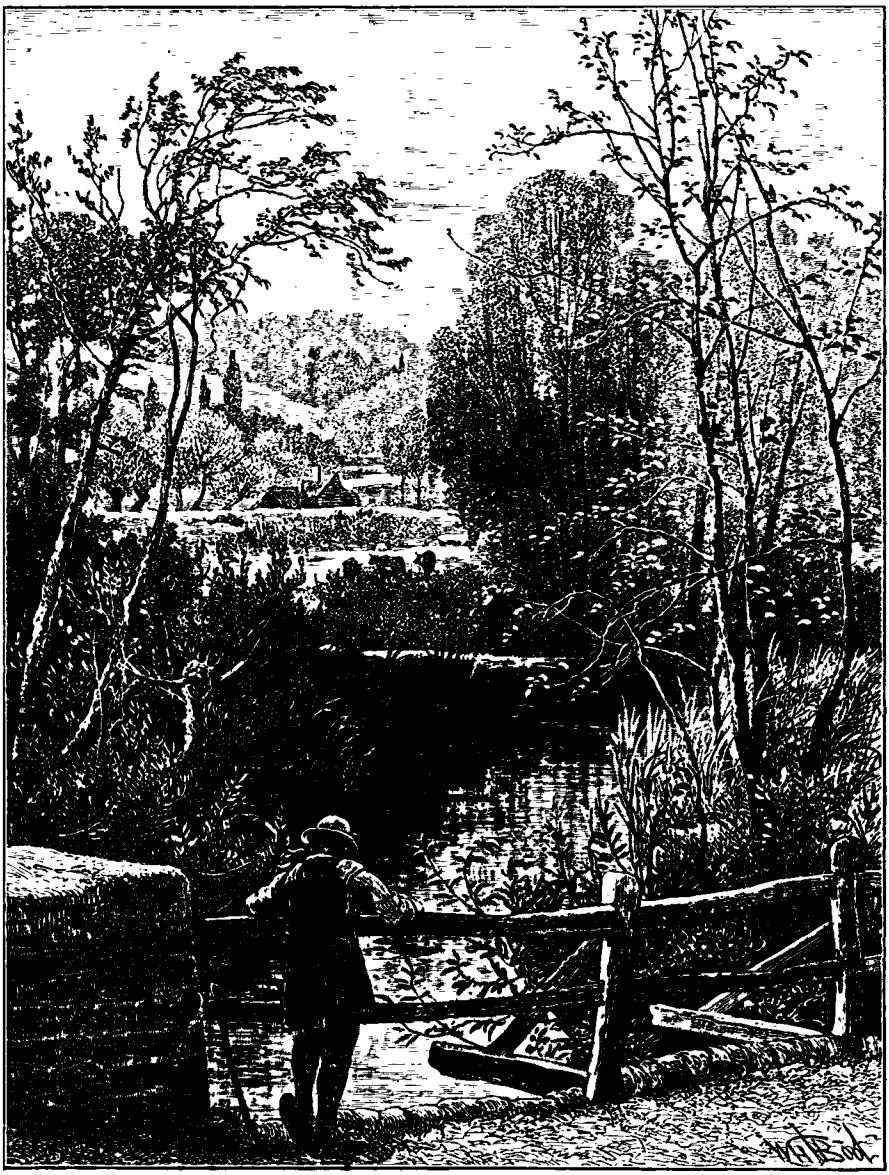


Indeed, I believe, that the way in which a pheasant goes off, does sometimes make young sportsmen a little nervous, (they don't own it very readily, but the observation may be relied on nevertheless,) until they get as it were broken in to the sound; and then that grand and sudden burst of wing becomes as pleasant to them as it seems to be to Dash, who is beating the hedgerow with might and main, and giving tongue louder, and sending the leaves about faster than ever—very proud of finding the pheasant, and perhaps a little angry with me for not shooting it; at least looking as if he would be angry if I were a man; for Dash

is a dog of great sagacity, and has doubtless not lived four years in the sporting world without making the discovery, that although gentlemen do shoot, ladies do not.

The Loddon at last! the beautiful Loddon! and the bridge, where every one stops, as by instinct, to lean over the rails, and gaze a moment on a landscape of surpassing loveliness,—the fine grounds of the Great House, with their magnificent groups of limes, and firs, and poplars grander than ever poplars were; the green meadows opposite, studded with oaks and elms; the clear winding river; the mill with its picturesque old buildings bounding the scene; all glowing with the rich colouring of autumn, and harmonized by the soft beauty of the clear blue sky, and the delicious calmness of the hour. The very peasant whose daily path it is, cannot cross that bridge without a pause.

But the day is wearing fast, and it grows colder and colder. I really think it will be a frost. After all, spring is the pleasantest season, beautiful as this scenery is. We must get on. Down that broad yet shadowy lane, between the park, dark with evergreens and dappled with



"AND THE BRIDGE, WHERE EVERY ONE STOPS, AS BY INSTINCT, TO LEAN OVER THE RAILS."

deer, and the meadows where sheep, and cows, and horses are grazing under the tall elms; that lane, where the wild bank, clothed with fern, and tufted with furze, and crowned by rich berried thorn, and thick shining holly on the one side, seems to vie in beauty with the picturesque old paling, the bright laurels, and the plumy cedars, on the other;—down that shady lane, until the sudden turn brings us to an opening where four roads meet, where a noble avenue turns down to the Great House; where the village church rears its modest spire from amidst its venerable yew trees; and where, embosomed in orchards and gardens,

and backed by barns and ricks, and all the wealth of the farm-yard, stands the spacious and comfortable abode of good Farmer Riley,—the end and object of our walk.

And in happy time the message is said, and the answer given, for this beautiful mild day is edging off into a dense frosty evening; the leaves

of the elm and the linden in the old avenue are quivering and vibrating and fluttering in the air, and at length falling crisply on the earth, as if Dash were beating for pheasants in the tree-tops; the sun gleams dimly through the fog, giving little more of light or heat than his fair sister the lady moon;—I don't know a more disappointing person than a cold sun; and I am beginning to wrap my cloak closely around me, and to calculate the distance to my own fireside, recanting all the way my praises of November, and longing for the showery, flowery April, as much as if I were a half-chilled butterfly, or a dahlia knocked down by the frost.

Ah, dear me! what a climate this is, that one cannot keep in the same mind about it for half an hour together! I wonder, by the way, whether the fault is in the weather, which Dash does not seem to care for, or in me? If I should happen to be wet through in a shower next spring, and should catch myself longing for autumn, that would settle the question.

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